

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



November 2019

Vol. 124, No. 11

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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## Swami Vivekananda on Spiritual Determination

There is no end to the power a man can obtain. At a certain period of Indian history, this one subject of man and his mind absorbed all their interest. The Indian mind became so thoroughly persuaded that the mind could do anything and everything according to law, that its powers became the great object of study. Different sects of Yogis began to make all sorts of experiments. The whole idea was to get at the basis, to reach the fine parts of the thing. It is no joke. I stand upon this platform talking to you and you go home and find no benefit; nor do I. Then you say, 'It is all bosh.' It is because you wanted to make a bosh of it. I know very little of this science, but the little that I gained I worked for thirty years of my life, and for six years I have been telling people the little that I know. It took me thirty years to learn it; thirty years of hard struggle. Sometimes I worked at it twenty hours during the twenty-four; sometimes I slept only one hour in the night; sometimes I worked whole nights; sometimes I lived in places where there was hardly a sound, hardly a breath; sometimes I had to live in caves. Think of that. And yet I know little or nothing; I have barely touched the hem of the garment of this science. But I can understand that it is true and vast and wonderful. Now, if there is any one amongst you who really wants to study this science, he will have to start with that sort of determination, the same as, nay even more than, that which he puts into any



business of life. Many men can succeed in business; very few in this. Because so much depends upon the particular constitution of the person studying it. This is the outline of the science. It stands upon its own feet and in its own light, and challenges comparison with any other science. There have been charlatans, there have been magicians, there have been cheats, and more here than in any other field. Why? For the same reason, that the more profitable the business, the greater the number of charlatans and cheats. But that is no reason why the business should not be good. And one thing more; it may be good intellectual gymnastics to listen to all the arguments and an intellectual satisfaction to hear of wonderful things. But, if any one of you really wants to learn something beyond that, merely attending lectures will not do. That cannot be taught in lectures, for it is life; and life can only convey life. If there are any amongst you who are really determined to learn it, I shall be very glad to help them.

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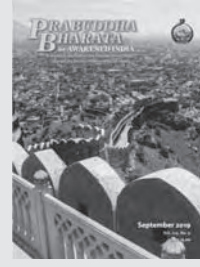
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

November 2019  
Vol. 124, No. 11

### मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

ओम् शुचौ देशे शुचिः सत्त्वस्थः सद्धीयान सद्वादी सद्वायी स्यादित्यतः सद्ब्रह्मणि सत्यभिलाषिणि निर्वृत्तोऽन्यस्तत्फलच्छिन्नपाशोनिराशः परेष्व्वात्मवद्विगतभयो निष्कामोऽक्षय्यमपरिमितं सुखमाक्रम्य तिष्ठति परमं वै शेषधेरिव परस्योद्धरणं यत् निष्कामत्वं स हि सर्वकाममयः पुरुषोऽध्यवसायसङ्कल्पाभिमानलिङ्गो बद्धोऽतस्तद्विपरीतो मुक्तः ।

॥ ६.३० ॥

*Om shuchau deshe shuchih sattvasthah sad-adhiyanah sad-vadi sad-dhyayi sad-yaji syad-ity-  
atah sad-brahmani satyabhilashini nirvritto'nyas-tat-phalach-chhinna-pasho-nirashah pareshv-  
atmavad-vigata-bhayo nishkamo'kshayyam-aparimitam sukhama-kramya tishthati paramam vai  
shevadheriva parasyoddharanam yat nishkamatvam sa hi sarva-kamamayah purusho'dhyavasaya-  
samkalpa-abhimana-lingo baddho'tas-tadviparito mukta.*

(6.30)

Om. One should be in a pure place, oneself pure, abiding in goodness, studying the real, speaking of the real, meditating on the real, sacrificing to the real. Thereafter, absorbed in the real Brahman, the one who yearns for the real, becomes a completely different person. Such a person has the reward of having one's bonds cut, is freed from expectations, is fearless of others as with oneself, is desireless, and remains having attained imperishable and immeasurable happiness. Indeed, freedom from desire is, as it were, the highest prize from the choicest treasure. For a person who is made up of all desires, who has the marks of determination, conception, and self-love is bound. One who is the opposite of that is liberated. (6.30)

# THIS MONTH

**P**RESENT-DAY HEALTH AND mental ailments are mainly due to the neglect of biorhythms and circadian rhythms. Thanks to technology, human beings are meddling with their natural daily cycles. The problems this meddling causes and ways to solve them are discussed in **The Sun is My Clock**.

When Swami Vivekananda came to America, he had to combat the clichés of popular Orientalism by denying that he was a miracle-worker or a magician. Rather than presenting himself as a Rasputin-like guru, he separated himself from metaphysical systems and therapies associated with occult belief and New Thought, warning his audience of the limitations of creeds such as Theosophy and Christian Science. This is discussed in **Swami Vivekananda in America—Debates, Miracles, Science, and Transcendence** by Ruth Harris, professor of history, All Souls College, University of Oxford.

Swami Kritarthananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, explains the ideal of serving God in living beings in **Leave God to Serve God**.

In both the Tenkalai sect of Srivaishnava Vishishtadvaita Vedanta and in the Dvaita Vedanta school of Madhvacharya, in particular in the work of Vadiraja, episodes of the Ramayana are cited as scriptural authority to indicate the supremacy of Vishnu in the pantheon of gods. In **Srivaishnava and Dvaita Vedanta Polemics and Interpretations of the Ramayana as a Bhakti Text**, Cameron M Wright, a graduate student of philosophy at the University of South

Florida explores the relationship between these two similar yet divergent schools of thought, and indicates some possible theological motivations for their mutual reliance on the authority of the Ramayana.

Bhaves A Kinkhabwala, a company secretary from Ahmedabad, writes on **Spirituality, Yoga, Morality, and Religion—A Perspective from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**.

The young have wonderful insights on various issues. In *Young Eyes*, such insights are brought to the readers every month. This month we see what children say about **Describing God**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Puja**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

A person's good actions and compassion can save another from the bad consequences of evil actions. This is shown in the second and final instalment of the story **Dharmadatta's Charity**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Robert Audi, John A O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and the author of *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character, Moral Value and Human Diversity, The Good in the Right*, and *Practical Reasoning and Ethical Decision* has written the book **Moral Perception**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

# *The Sun is My Clock*

**Y**OU ARE NOT AN OWL. Neither are you a bat. You are a human being. But do you remember this? Do you remember that you are a diurnal being and not a nocturnal living being like an owl or a bat? Do you remember this when you try bingeing on your favourite Web series or when you stay up late, almost till the morning, trying to finish your work from the office? No, you do not. And that is why you are increasingly becoming the breeding ground of many lifestyle diseases. Your paunch is becoming the harbinger of your arrival at places and you do not feel rested no matter however long be the duration of your siesta. Your cholesterol level is constantly going up. Your emotional health, on the other hand, is showing a downward trend. Your control over your emotions is waning. What has happened? You are gradually becoming an owl and losing your status of being a human being.

Our brain carries the neural structure of the numerous metabolic processes taking place in our body. It also regulates the functioning of various vital organs in the body like the heart. It controls other phenomena like breathing. All this follow a pattern that is the same day after day. There is an internal clock in our body, a mechanism in the brain that works according to the different times of the day and the night. This clock is variously called biorhythm or circadian rhythm. It affects various aspects of our body like the body temperature, sleep-wake cycles, eating habits, digestion, hormone releases, and so on.

The human brain has a biological clock,

circadian rhythm, or biorhythm of a diurnal being. In other words, we are hardwired to be waking in the day and sleeping in the night. All our bodily functions are programmed to work properly when we sleep in the night and are awake during the day. That is, Nature wants us to make the sun our clock. Have we done that?

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**You are not an owl. Neither are you a bat. Do you remember that you are a human being?**

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Our daily habits and lifestyle have drastically changed over some decades. Particularly in the case of millennials, the daily routine has been distorted to a large extent. Food habits, social behaviour, hygiene, sleep-wake cycles, and many other integral aspects of the daily life of a human being have been significantly changed. Human beings are not behaving as human beings, at least not as they were programmed to behave by Nature.

Sleep is crucial to the normal functioning of the human body. It is during sleep that the body breaks down the food consumed during the day in order to assimilate it into the body. It is during sleep that the mind relaxes and releases stress. Only with proper rest can a person get the complete results of physical exercises and workouts. Circadian rhythms regulate the speeding up or slowing down of many bodily functions. For instance, in the day time, the body is prepared for more activity while the body is conditioned for lesser activity during the night. Most of our organs, if not all, function according to specific

rhythms depending upon different periods of the day and the night. Therefore, any change in the sleep-wake cycles affects all these organs.

It has been proven over and over again by researchers that the human body delivers its optimum performance only when it follows biorhythms to the maximum. Any change in the various cycles that we are supposed to follow naturally because of the way human beings are built, leads to various problems in the body and the mind. The environment is crucial in maintaining the circadian rhythms. So, while you might think that you could just darken your room and go to sleep during the day, that would not work because the surroundings are not as calm and silent as during the night.

Circadian rhythms or biorhythms also influence the emotional behaviour of the human beings. Researchers have found a correlation between disturbances in biorhythms and accidents in factories or roads. When a person is in a critical phase of the circadian or biorhythmic cycle, that person is prone to commit mistakes and end up being a victim of an accident. Circadian rhythms or biorhythms have been known to operate in cycles that could be classified as physical, emotional, intellectual, intuitive, aesthetic, self-awareness, and spiritual. They can be also classified as time cycles of multiple years, annual, monthly, weekly, and daily.

What is the reason of this shift from diurnal activity of human beings to nocturnal activity? It is technology and the desire for achieving more than we can. We work when we are supposed to sleep. We sleep when we are supposed to be awake. Across the world, all traditional systems of schooling emphasise the importance of waking up early. In the Eastern traditions, waking up at least half an hour before sunrise and going to bed a few hours after sunset was considered an essential habit for a healthy living. All students,

both of the secular and spiritual sciences, were required to do the first study or spiritual practices for the day in the *brahma muhurta*, the time of Brahman, that is approximately from 3.30 a.m. to 5.30 a.m.

The main reason for a major change in the sleep-wake cycles of Indians is the increase in Indians working for multinational corporations having their headquarters on the other side of the globe, where the day and night cycles are exactly opposite in timings to the Indian day and night cycles. In order to do work for these multinational corporations, Indians have to remain awake when it is night in India, so that those in the West have no discomfort. In search of money and prestige, countless Indians are spoiling their physical and mental health beyond repair. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cholesterol, and various other ailments are on the rise in India. Many of these ailments have been found to have a direct link with erratic sleep-wake cycles.

Today, India is one of the countries in the world with a young workforce. Indians are damaging this precious human resource by becoming greedy for having more by working on the terms of multinational corporations. These multinational corporations do not seek India for doing charity. They seek India because they get cheap skilled labour. Indians should have the wisdom of demanding healthier working hours. If multinational corporations want to profit from cheap Indian skilled labour, let them adjust their time-tables for their Indian workforce and let them get work from people in India only during the Indian day.

This is the only way India can save her youth from getting weaker by the day. This is the only way that Indians can return to their being human beings. This is the only way they can stop becoming owls and bats.



# *Swami Vivekananda in America—Debates, Miracles, Science, and Transcendence*

Ruth Harris

WHEN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA came to America, he had to combat the clichés of popular Orientalism by denying that he was miracle-worker or a magician. Rather than presenting himself as a Rasputin-like guru, he separated himself from metaphysical systems and therapies associated with occult belief and New Thought, warning his audience of the limitations of creeds such as Theosophy and Christian Science. He was remarkable in his ability to assess the complicated and sometimes divisive world of occultism, Protestant sectarianism, and healing that he witnessed in America after the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893. Instead, he presented his own Hindu universalism as a source of ancient wisdom, recast and regenerated, that sought not to interfere with the subject's spiritual growth. Raja yoga, he argued, did not require hypnotic operators, occult mediums, or Christian Science healers. To convey his ideas, he presented raja yoga as a science spiritualised and was especially keen to use the metaphors of popular science—evolution, physics, and electromagnetism—to explain the search for superconsciousness or samadhi through a better understanding of mental concentration. He owed a good deal to Williams James's faculty psychology to convey his ideas, but William James was also indebted to Swamiji, and more particularly to notions of the 'beyond', of a 'Mother-sea of consciousness', which resonated with the oceanic metaphors that both Sri

Ramakrishna and Swamiji favoured. Although Swamiji and James did not agree, they worked within a common set of intellectual, scientific, psychological, and spiritual parameters that shaped the transnational study of 'subliminal consciousness' and mysticism.

When Swamiji came to America in 1893, and people sought to understand the curious figure of the Indian guru, they yearned for a miracle-worker, not a man of science. They imagined a yogi who could accomplish feats like walking on hot coals, but were disappointed: 'Swami Vivekananda was questioned concerning the truthfulness of the marvellous stories of the performance of wonderful feats of conjuring, levitation, suspended animation, and the like in India. Vivekananda said: "We do not believe in miracles at all"'<sup>1</sup> Later, another journalist requested that 'he work a miracle in proof of [his] religion', but he continually responded that the 'pure Hindu religion' was not based on such things (3.495).

He repeatedly sought to distinguish Vedanta from the range of occult and healing therapies that were associated with 'New Thought' or the 'mind-cure movement' in America. William James, the great psychologist, described the features of this spiritual tide as an

optimistic scheme of life, with both a speculative and a practical side. ... and it must now be reckoned with as a genuine religious power. ...

One of the doctrinal sources of Mind-cure is the four Gospels; another is Emersonianism or New England transcendentalism; another is Berkeleyan idealism; another is spiritism, with its messages of 'law' and 'progress' and 'development'; another the optimistic popular science evolutionism ... and, finally, Hinduism.<sup>2</sup>

Swamiji came for the World's Parliament of Religions, an occasion which launched him onto the international stage. He arrived with little money, no connections, and without even an invitation to a gathering designed to display American Protestant modernism through a dialogue with 'inferior' faiths. The terms Buddhism and Hinduism were largely nineteenth-century neologisms, sustained by orientalist scholarship that fed into the growing field of comparative religion.<sup>3</sup> As they homogenised many different Asian traditions, they also helped create the canon of so-called 'world religions' that the Parliament hierarchised still further. But the intentions of the organisers were foiled by the interventions of Swamiji and others, who used the gathering to condemn Christian missionising and to exalt Indian spirituality as superior to the materialism and brutality of the West. Swamiji went on to become one of the most famous of nineteenth-century Indian spiritual figures, the founder of 'modern' yoga, the mouthpiece for what is known as 'Hindu universalism' or 'neo-Vedanta'. Equally, he was the source of much Indian cultural revival, streams of thought and practice essential to anti-Imperialism and later nationalism, some would say even Hindutva. He became an international figure, who established the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in India famous for its philanthropic outreach and the numerous Vedanta Societies that dot the globe. His goal while 'missionising the West' was not necessarily to gain converts, however: 'I want you to keep your own belief;

I want to make the Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; the Unitarian a better Unitarian.'<sup>4</sup> He sought to introduce the spiritual wisdom of an ancient religion and culture without insisting that Westerners lose their own, hoping to awaken Americans and Europeans to the wrongs of Christian coercion in the subcontinent. He made headway through his perfect English, his philosophical wherewithal, and wit. This article will explain how he positioned himself to implant the precepts of Hindu universalism, by writing *Raja Yoga* (1896), a work which sought to create a 'science of religion'.

This was not to suggest that Swamiji was inured to strange and extraordinary happenings, and concerned intermittently with addressing the reality of psychic powers. But he dismissed occult explanations and *Raja Yoga* sought transcendence rather than 'mind-cure', all explained in an eclectic language that mixed neuroscience, evolution, physics, psychology, and neo-Vedantin philosophy. He argued that 'maya' kept us wedded to the illusory materiality of the everyday, hiding from us our unity with the Divine, and the absolute which existed in everyone and everything. He argued for a non-duality or Advaita, in which he explained that 'one exists as many', that 'there is no difference between the sun and you', 'between the table and me', with non-duality experienced through a deep concentration or what he called 'superconsciousness' (1.150-1).

His considerable success was underpinned by two strategies. The first separated what was venerable from the fashions of New Thought, Spiritualism, and Theosophy; the second placed raja yoga within the scientific study of psychological research, practised by the likes of William James, as a means of demonstrating yoga and Vedanta's superiority. Such a strategy was not just

presentation, but central to how Swamiji viewed Vedanta as a science of religion and a religion of science that broke down the erroneous boundaries that occidental thought had imposed. Whether the Western acolytes who engaged in meditation understood the details of his reflections is not clear. Today, few in New York or San Francisco, who practise the yoga that Swamiji introduced, realise that he had in part attempted to spiritualise the West as a means of promoting anti-imperialism and Hindu universalism.

### **Miracles, Occult, and Theosophy**

When Swamiji refused to work a miracle for the readers of *The Evening News*, he was doing more than objecting to American sensationalism. He believed himself to have occult powers, but normally renounced their use on the grounds that they were an impractical means of reaching God. He was both unsurprised by the psychic and telepathic phenomena that he met in the West and bemused by what he saw as the spiritually infantile interpretations placed upon them. He insisted always on searching for natural explanations for curious phenomena. Indeed, he wanted to separate his programme, which he saw as the scientific and spiritual updating of ancient traditions, from the current fashions for spiritualism and especially Theosophy.

Theosophy had developed in the West as a revolt against conventional Christianity and was an attempt to link science and religion in novel ways, but its claims were frequently ridiculed because of the fraudulent practices, esotericism, and occultism of its advocates.<sup>5</sup> A cosmopolitan movement with followers around the globe, the Theosophical Society was created by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steele Olcott in 1875, after they met while observing the spiritualist performances of the Fox Sisters in Hydesville, New York. These sisters were famous for

launching the spiritualist upsurge that began with general conversations in 1848. Dissatisfied with what they saw, Blavatsky and Olcott collaborated in a study of occult phenomena and comparative religion.<sup>6</sup>

They aimed to create a ‘Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour’.<sup>7</sup> In practice, neither Western nor South Asian Theosophists ever attained this universalism or the egalitarianism that such declarations implied, but the aspiration helped to undermine imperialist assumptions. Blavatsky insisted she had superseded spiritualism by contacting not the ordinary dead but the mahatmas, the teachers of occult wisdom who lived in elevated planes. For many, these occult informants, Master Moriya and Koot Hoomi, were composite images of Indian gurus and symbols of less hierarchical relationships. The mahatmas existed in spiritual realms where colonialism did not exist, and Theosophy aimed to spread their messages of hope and service worldwide. The focus on ‘universal brotherhood’ partially explains Theosophy’s popularity among many South Asian elites, with adherents including such notables as Motilal Nehru and his son.<sup>8</sup> Annie Besant, who headed the Society from 1891, would become a friend to important Indian nationalists of both the ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’ factions, and received grudging respect for her activism even from Swamiji.

Theosophists attacked Christianity by criticising its opposition to evolution, assuring their admirers that the contact with the mahatmas, central to the programme, was scientifically tested and verified. They also exalted the power of the ‘higher mind’ over materialist neuroscience, hence the bridge often made to the East, seen as the fountainhead of an otherworldly spirituality. They argued, like many Hindus, that there was one ‘Absolute’, ‘the one Reality’,

causeless, timeless, and indescribable, in which states of matter and consciousness become manifest, and 'the appearance and disappearance of Worlds is like a regular tidal ebb of flux and reflux'.<sup>9</sup> Both Theosophy and Swamiji were at odds with Darwin's mechanism of natural selection because it emphasised struggle and 'survival of the fittest' based on the hazards and harshness of adaptation.<sup>10</sup> Such notions contrasted with the 'law' of karma which emphasised instead moral 'cause-and-effect'. The Theosophists argued that individual souls or Monads were fundamentally identical to the 'Universal Over-Soul' in much the same way that sparks were part of a greater fire. The Monads evolved, as did the greater whole, in a process informed by intelligence and purpose rather than hazard, hence distinguishing it from the vagaries of Darwinism.

By stressing 'karma', the Theosophists embraced a central belief of Hinduism. Equally, ideas of reincarnation, of the importance of death as the beginning of rebirth, and the insistence on non-duality all resonated easily with key South Asian spiritual concepts. Swamiji would have agreed with many of these formulations and assented to the notion that biological forces 'intermingle with, and often merge into, those forces that we have named intellectual and moral'.<sup>11</sup> Unfeeling matter ultimately becomes a thinking subject, from which human consciousness emerges. Such views suggested that neuroscience, which focused on the physical brain, was inadequate to explain the true reality that was 'superconsciousness'. Swamiji even acknowledged that 'behind such strange names as Indian Theosophy and Esoteric Buddhism ... there was something real, something worth knowing'.<sup>12</sup>

He realised, then, that Blavatsky and Olcott were attempting a synthesis of science and religion similar to his own undertaking. He knew too that the notion of the 'brotherhood

of man' and religious universalism were themes that underpinned his own Hindu universalism. However, he objected to Theosophy because he suspected the mahatmas were fraudulent—later confirmed by the 1884 London Psychical Society investigation of Blavatsky's practices—and believed that, despite its message of brotherly love, Theosophy still assumed Western superiority. When Blavatsky spoke of Koot Hoomi, she described him as a fussy office worker, as someone who complained that he did not have the right office paper to respond to her. She thus presented him as a native clerk, a Bengali babu, who fussed and fretted about inessentials.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Blavatsky had Indian 'chelas', or 'adept-trainees', who surrendered their inheritance and families to follow her. Together with Olcott, she created a 'great white brotherhood ... [with] little dark helpers', a set of new hierarchical relationships that would plague Theosophy for generations.<sup>14</sup> While Indian gurus also had disciples, they did so within an indigenous Indian tradition of spirituality that liberated devotees from property and householder obligations. The relationship to the guru, as a human manifestation of an Eternal Teacher, was widely understood and deeply rooted. By making herself the container for the mahatmas's esoteric knowledge, however, Blavatsky set herself up as the European mediator of a decontextualised Indian philosophy that was institutionalised with the occultist and scientific regalia of Theosophy. In some notes, Swamiji condemned Theosophy as an 'Indian grafting of American Spiritualism—with only a few Sanskrit words taking the place of spiritualistic jargon'.<sup>15</sup> Privately, he thought Theosophy was nonsense, with whatever truth it contained of Indian origin.

Christian Science was far more difficult to assess; it too revealed realms of overlapping possibility with Hinduism, but ultimately fell short

of Vedantin spiritual insights. And yet, its very name suggested the connections between science and religion that he was trying to forge. Early in his stay in America, he noted that the Christian Scientists ‘form the most influential party ... figuring everywhere’ (6.270). He was impressed enough to call them ‘Vedantins’, but qualified this by saying that ‘they had picked up a few doctrines of the Advaita and grafted them upon the Bible’ (ibid.). His characterisation was perspicacious—Mary Baker Eddy, Christian Science’s founder, does seem to have had some familiarity with Vedantin ideas and Eastern thought, but it was equally true that her deepest inspiration was biblical.

Like Swamiji, she sought to separate her own beliefs from the range of mind-cure therapies—especially mesmerism, hypnotism, and spiritualism—that were then in vogue. She had pitted herself against her father’s punitive Calvinism by initially experimenting with spiritualism and a range of healing therapies—she had long periods as an invalid—right up to 1872. When she ‘discovered’ Christian Science in that year after what she thought was a life-threatening fall, she maintained a key distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘Mind’, the second being the divine Mind which revealed Christ’s healing powers. In contrast, the human mind was the source of disease, riven by error and immorality, and convinced wrongly of the materiality of the world. The Kingdom of God was not in the future, but confined by mentalities that hid true Spirit. Conventional Christian preachers rejected her formulations, believing that human beings were destined to disease and death because of their finitude and mortality. However, Eddy insisted that humanity’s suffering, which seemed so real and overpowering, was nothing more than ‘waking dream-shadows’.<sup>16</sup>

According to Vedanta, the material world

was ‘maya’ or the veil that hid the reality of non-duality. Swamiji followed his teacher Sri Ramakrishna in comparing ‘superconsciousness’ or samadhi, in which non-duality was reached, to a salt doll that melts in the ocean, the boundaries dissolving in infinity.<sup>17</sup> Advaitic notions of this kind became important in discussions of the ‘Unconscious’. In the 1920s, for example, Romain Rolland read both Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji and came to see this ‘oceanic feeling’, associated with mysticism as central to creativity, especially artistic creativity. Freud, in contrast, saw this same sense of blissful union merely as an infantile regression to the womb.<sup>18</sup> Equally, the oceanic metaphors may well have been important to James’s own view of the ‘subliminal unconscious’ and a vision of the beyond that he called the ‘Mother Sea of Consciousness’. Eddy too had included quotations from the Bhagavad-gita in her *Science and Health*, and was herself an inheritor of Emersonian Transcendentalism—she even sought to heal the aging American thinker with Christian Science during his final illness. Emerson had coined the notion of the ‘Oversoul’, as he too sought to experience divine power directly.<sup>19</sup>

But these influences could not erase her fundamental commitment to Christianity and her view of Buddhism and Hinduism as heathenism. For his part, Swamiji returned the favour by privately ridiculing Christian Science, and comparing it to the Kartabhaja sect, a stream of Vaishnavism that called God *karta* and believed in the power of faith healing. Such descriptions were a distortion of Eddy’s thought, but the remarks conveyed his sense that her fame and the growth of Christian Science devotees rested on miracle cures, not on the more painstaking spiritual discipline that Vedanta demanded. Nonetheless, he knew that Christian Science provided a lexicon for teaching aspects of Vedanta: when he spoke

of mundane reality as a 'dream state', his devotees understood him through Eddy's formulations.

### Raja Yoga

Today Swamiji is both praised and blamed for the invention of 'modern yoga' in *Raja Yoga*. Admirers see his synthesis as a credit to his openness and his perspicacity in translating a difficult, virtually unknown practice into terms, which a new public could appreciate. Critics see *Raja Yoga* as inauthentic, detached from orthodox Hinduism, and a derivative of Western thought and its global hegemony.<sup>20</sup> Neither account encompasses its intellectual aspirations that reflected shifts in healing and spiritual culture in India as well as in America, Britain, and the West more generally. By the time Swamiji came westward, America was enthusiastically engaged in Christian Science, homoeopathy, hypnotherapy, and spiritualism; Bengal equally had its own religious and healing movements, such as the Brahmo Samaj, a kind of Hindu monotheism stripped of ritualism, and the Arya Samaj, a revivalist and fundamentalist orthodox Hinduism, spiritualism, hypnotism as well as a deep-rooted and Indianised homoeopathy.<sup>21</sup> These ideas, practices, and amalgams would appear in *Raja Yoga*. When he wrote the volume, it was pervaded by science, and especially by the psychology and emerging philosophy of William James, an interlocutor and acquaintance, who travelled in the same circles.

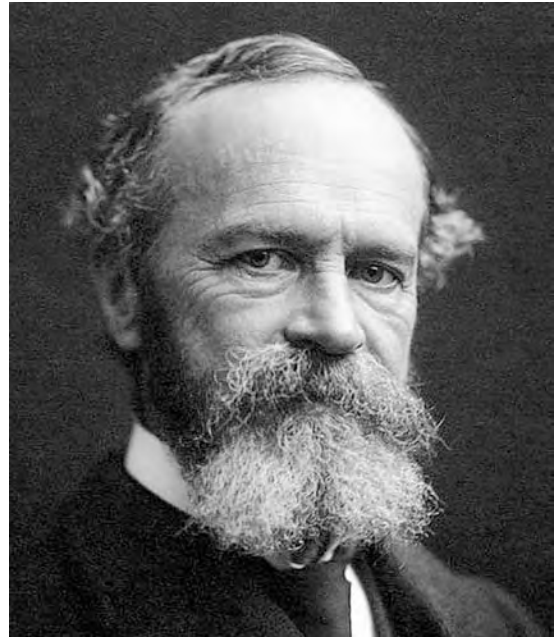
The connection here was important: James was perhaps the first American philosopher of international repute and he had promised to write the preface to Swamiji's book; he never got around to it. Both men shared interests in psychical experimentation and operated in similar spheres of philosophical and spiritual reflection and inquiry. Until a recent work by Krister Dylan Knapp,<sup>22</sup> historians of ideas have

been wary of exploring James's commitment to what now seems like fringe science and religion, but his research was decades in the making and central to all he did. He was lifelong friends with members of the London Society for the Study of Psychical Research, many of whom were the sons of Protestant ministers, who themselves had undergone severe crises of faith. No longer conventional Christians, they were nonetheless committed to testing whether or not there was an afterlife. James experienced extended periods of spiritual turmoil and suffered from neurasthenia and depression. His preoccupation with psychical research seemed strongly rooted in his search for greater vigour and spiritual peace.

Although normally hostile to institutional responsibilities, James took on the presidency of the American Psychical Society and had an indirect but significant role in unmasking Helena Blavatsky and the notorious Italian medium Eusapia Palladino, who claimed to levitate tables and communicate with the dead. But he was convinced by the veracity of a Mrs Piper, a Boston spiritualist. He called her his 'white crow', an exception among the flock of otherwise black squawking birds. This admission was important, for it shows the ambivalence that he intermittently expressed in his methodological, metaphysical, and private writings. From *Pragmatism* (1907), he characterised the new discipline as a struggle between the 'tough-minded' and 'tender-minded'. The first equated 'mind' with 'brain', and was comprised of laboratory experimentalists, who were 'Empiricist, Sensationalistic, Materialistic, Pessimistic, Irreligious, Fatalistic, Pluralistic, [and] Sceptical'; they opposed the second group, who, like Swamiji, were 'Rationalistic, Intellectualistic, Idealistic, Optimistic, Religious, Free-Willist, Monist, and Dogmatical'.<sup>23</sup> James's philosophical pragmatism sought a middle way between the two, a kind of tertium quid

that would enable him to explore subjectivity as a datum of experience. He argued that the method was empirical in the sense of collecting the testimony of practitioners, observing their practices, and respecting what he called their ‘will to believe’, while rejecting their ‘absolutism’.

Despite scepticism from colleagues, James staked his reputation on Mrs Piper, and in the period between 1895 and 1899 confided in private that he did believe in some notion of the ‘beyond’. He expressed beliefs that, at first glance, were strikingly similar to those employed by Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. He wrote that ‘there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir.’<sup>24</sup> In talking about the ‘mother-sea of consciousness’, or the cosmic ‘reservoir’, he used the same watery metaphors of dissolution and unity that the Indian gurus employed. And when criticised that such notions did not hold out enough room for individuality, he sought to maintain his ‘third way’ by explaining that the ‘mother-sea’ need not be ‘monistically or transcendental-absolutely determined.’<sup>25</sup> He elaborated later that the ‘individual’s consciousness may survive the brain, for in the Mother Sea the scars of cerebral operations may remain as records of the transaction, like stubs in a cheque book, and form the basis of an eternally remembered account’ (William James to James Ward, 28 January 1899). Strikingly, James mixes the metaphor of the ‘Mother-Sea’ with the transactional notion of a cheque book with its stubs—a combination which perhaps reflects the opposition that he was trying, uneasily, to reconcile. They suggested, perhaps, the sometimes warring nature of his ‘tender-minded’ and ‘tough-minded’ impulses, and the enduring struggle to find a methodology and epistemological position that encompassed both.



William James

In his 1907 *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, James characterised the Advaita Vedanta of Swamiji as a form of mysticism, one of the religious experiences that he had chronicled earlier in the volume of that name in 1902. For James, Swamiji’s ideas were monist absolutism, securing but intellectually suspect: ‘An Absolute One, and I that One—surely we have a religion which, emotionally considered, has a high pragmatic value; it imparts a perfect sumptuousness of security.’ He concluded, moreover, that ‘we all have some ear for this monistic music’ for it ‘elevates and reassures’ and, in denying ‘moral separateness’ suggests the ‘passion of love’ brings ‘all sentient life’ together.<sup>26</sup>

Swamiji argued the opposite: that understanding the beauty of the world necessitated the appreciation of ugliness, and the realisation that they were interconnected. He railed against his female devotees who wanted him to teach people to be ‘good’; like ‘sin’, he held such notions to be Christian in the worst sense; like the cycle of destruction and rebirth central to Indian

philosophy, spiritual elevation encompassed the appreciation of both 'evil' and 'good'. He concluded in *Raja Yoga*, 'To him who desires nothing ... the manifold changes of nature are one panorama of beauty and sublimity',<sup>27</sup> even if, from our limited quotidian perspective, destruction abounded. Neo-Vedanta thus consigned no one to eternal damnation—a belief, Swamiji implied, that cordoned off evil rather than encompassing it within an endless cycle. Everywhere in *Raja Yoga*, he spoke of constant change, processes of creation and destruction, much like the inhalation and expulsion of breath. Once again, he resorted to water metaphors, to the 'oceanic': 'Each form represents, as it were, one whirlpool in the infinite ocean of matter, of which not one is constant. ... all forms of existence are so many whirlpools. A mass of matter enters into one whirlpool, say a human body, stays there for a period, becomes changed, and goes out into another, say an animal body this time, from which again after a few years, it enters into another whirlpool, called a lump of mineral. ... Not one body is constant. There is no such thing as my body, or your body, except in words' (1.151).

Such a vision of flux in unity was at the heart of Swamiji's 'science of religion' which, like the one that James propagated, classed subjective experience as empirical 'facts'. Both occupied the same 'oceanic' discourse, but related to its meaning in very different ways. Swamiji also took from James and seemed almost to parrot his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) when he remarked that 'Surface scientists, unable to explain the various extraordinary mental phenomena, strive to ignore their very existence' (1.121). Using Sri Ramakrishna's authority, Indian yogic teaching, as much as James's psychology, Swamiji suggested his object was to know 'the internal nature of man' by 'observing the facts that are going on within' (1.129).

Swamiji tried to present 'raja yoga'—'the realisation of divinity through control of the mind', as a bodily practice with both a 'science' and a spirituality superior to the other experimental religions or therapies on offer. And so, what he proposed was extremely eclectic. Elizabeth De Michelis<sup>28</sup> has shown how the emphasis on prana in yoga, translated loosely as the breath, and its harmonious distribution recalled mesmeric fluid and the healing made possible by 'magnetic force'. In describing dhyana, meditation, Swamiji used a vocabulary of electrical connection: 'When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a certain internal or external location, there comes to it the power of flowing in an unbroken current ... towards that point.'<sup>29</sup> Metaphors of light, refraction, and vibration pervaded the text: 'The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated; when they are concentrated, they illumine. This is our only means of knowledge. ... this requires a great deal of practice' (1.129).

Swamiji, as much as James, generally spurned the mysterious. But not always. On one occasion he told a group of would-be sannyasins: 'I have a power which I seldom use—the power of reading the mind. If you will permit me, I should like to read your mind, as I wish to initiate you with the others tomorrow.'<sup>30</sup> Generally, though, he was more down to earth. Josephine Macleod, one of his closest associates, described a disciple's conversation with Swamiji: 'Mrs. Roethlisberger said, "I see a light". He said, "Good, keep on". "O no, it is more like a glow at the heart". And he said to me, "Good, keep on". That is all he ever taught me' (415). Nor did he direct: 'You may meditate on whatever you like' (532) and saw meditation simply as part of a daily routine: 'The monkey mind [a term that described the drunken chattering thoughts in our heads] ... the silence of the Inner Self, the necessity of practice, the study of the teaching which teaches


liberation of the Self' (543–4), this is how Isabelle Margesson described Swamiji's lessons.

Swamiji opposed hypnotherapists and Christian Scientists because he believed their operations diminished individuals' spiritual power. Any outside force was dangerous; the guru was nothing more than a guide and example, hence his constant instructions to 'keep on going'. Also, although raja yoga was body-conscious to some extent, Swamiji looked askance at hathayoga, which, in his view deals 'entirely with the physical body, its aim being to make the physical body very strong. ... health is the chief idea.'<sup>31</sup> In teaching meditation, he directed his listeners to assume the right posture, but only as a way to higher consciousness and was worried about the allure of complicated gymnastic poses. The focus was mental, despite the recognition that mental power required physical discipline.

He distinguished between prana, most vividly exemplified by the inward and outward movement of the lungs, and pranayama, which was control of the prana. Prana was the vital force which moved akasha or inert form, the all-pervading but imperceptible physical substance and the essence of all things in the material world. Such vitalistic reasoning spiritualised force to reveal a dynamic transformation confirmed by 'modern physics ... [which] has demonstrated that the sum total of the energies in the universe is the same throughout' (1.152). From such cosmological reckonings, Swamiji shifted to theorising about great religious leaders. 'The gigantic will-powers of the world, the world-movers', he maintained, 'can bring their Prana into a high state of vibration, and it is so great and powerful that it catches others in a moment' (1.155). From his experience of Sri Ramakrishna, he looked at the great yogis of India who were able to unleash their kundalini, the primal energy or shakti coiled up in the base of the spine. They awakened

to 'superconsciousness' or samadhi 'to master the whole universe' (1.133).

Egalitarian in his spiritual sensibility, Swamiji believed that even householders would be able to engage in raja yoga, to achieve the concentration that would be both mind-altering and nature-defying. In contrast, the healing 'sects' he observed in America, while having some notion of what prana was, did not have the proper pranayama. He warned them against the instrumentalism of their search and concluded that 'there is no liberation in getting powers. It is a worldly search after enjoyments' (1.211). In statements of this kind, he encompassed spiritualist séances and magical powers, and insisted that his audience remember that meditation took time and persistence.

In sum, notions drawn from Western science helped Swamiji translate Indian metaphysical concepts into language that his devotees might understand, while also shifting the theorisation of yoga. As his remarks about the great yogis suggest, India's adepts had discovered the laws of 'mind realisation' and 'superconsciousness' once alive in a Western mystical tradition that were now buried, attacked as superstition, and persecuted as witchcraft. Western science thus offered a means of conceptualising what he already knew and enabled him at the same time to rescue Western mysticism from scorn. By collapsing force and matter as well as science and religion, he appealed to the many Americans who rejected a mechanistic vision of the universe and who turned to meditation for the transcendental holism that neo-Vedanta offered. 

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27. *Complete Works*, 1.186–7.
28. See *A History of Modern Yoga*, 150.
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# Leave God to Serve God

Swami Kritarthananda

ON THE FACE of it, the title seems to be a paradox or at most a pun on the words. How can one leave aside God and also serve God? One cannot have a cake and eat it too! Hence the sentence leaves ample ground for explanation. We shall prove as a matter of course that in the first place it is neither a paradox nor a pun on words but an aphoristic statement of deep significance and in the second place, it is a sublime idea discovered and implemented by the sages of yore, almost since the dawn of civilisation.

In writing the primers on Vedanta, the authors posit some typical concepts in order to establish the true imports of the *mahavakyas*. These concepts are named *jahallakshana* and *ajahallakshana*. They are used to catch the inherent meaning conveyed in a statement of apparently meaningless or contradictory nature. For example, when one says, 'Go hang yourself' to another one does not mean it literally; one only means disapproval or dislike of something. In another example, we hear people say: 'That person lives at the confluence of two rivers.' This is construed as 'that person lives in a place near the confluence.' The former method is called *jahallakshana* and the latter as *ajahallakshana*.

In the same way, we can attempt to find the inner meaning of the statement 'leave God to serve God'. It means that one must train oneself to transcend the conventional idea of worshipping God in the temple alone and should scatter broadcast one's vision of God in all beings—not only in humankind but in all living beings.

It prods us to give up the limited ideas about God and rediscover God as scintillating in all living beings, and more so in the suffering, miserable fellow creatures, in the wicked, in the distressed, in the 'moving gods' whom the ignorant call 'human beings' by mistake as pointed out by Swami Vivekananda.

Strangely enough, this idea is one of the seminal concepts in our hoary scriptures. In explaining the nature of a devotee, Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita that a devotee is self-controlled, even-minded in outlook, and engaged in the welfare of all beings.<sup>1</sup> Again, in the Bhagavata, the Lord emphatically says: 'I live in all beings as their inner Self; yet people make a show of worshipping me in still images to the neglect of that moving representation of mine.' Further, he says more poignantly: 'He who worships me in images out of delusion, leaving aside that great worship in all living beings, only pours oblation on embers.'<sup>2</sup> This clearly points out the futile result of limiting God in images alone. It gives priority to the age-old Vedantic concept of the all-pervasiveness of God. In this article, we shall try to elucidate this beautiful concept from practical, living examples.

## Two Types of Meditation

Once Sri Ramakrishna made a revealing statement at Dakshineswar. He said: 'One can meditate even with eyes open. One can meditate even while talking.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly, on another occasion he said, closing his eyes: 'Does God exist only when the eyes are closed, and cease to exist when the



eyes are opened? The Lila belongs to Him to whom the Nitya belongs, and the Nitya belongs to Him to whom the Lila belongs' (778).

These statements open a new vista in the world of religion. In the first place, Sri Ramakrishna gave a more comprehensive definition than the popular notion of meditation. There are two types of meditation: meditation as a technique and as a normal state of consciousness. The former is of a copybook type prescribing various steps from withdrawal to the final attainment, from the negative to the positive. At set times of the day and night one has to practise them. The intensity of meditation depends mostly on the factors of the body, the mind, surroundings, the state of the external nature—daybreak and twilight are the most auspicious and conducive moments for meditation when the external and internal natures work in harmony and so on. There are prescribed methods in our scriptures for such meditations. Such a practice is the struggle of the aspirant rather than attainment.

The second type of meditation, namely a state of consciousness, is that which follows the first

type of meditation, that is meditation as a technique. Once the aspirant steps into this state of consciousness, the revelation dawns upon one that everything, static and dynamic, is saturated with that One existence in essence. It is not that the aspirant does not see the many, the manifestation of the phenomenal world, but in and through that the aspirant feels the eternal unity of existence. The Upanishads are replete with such statements.<sup>4</sup>

In the second place, the above two statements of Sri Ramakrishna convey the idea of the immanence of God overtly. Seeing God with closed eyes implies essaying to comprehend the transcendent one who is beyond all sense-perceptions. Closed eyes symbolically represent withdrawal of all the sense-organs from the outside world. But after revelation, the same transcendent existence is seen to express itself in all manifested forms like, in Sri Ramakrishna's words, 'the material of both the terrace and the staircase leading to it'.

Strewn large in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, this type of statements epitomises the philosophy behind Sri Ramakrishna's life and preaching. If the One and the many are the obverse and reverse of the same reality, then all our secular works *can* become the means to link us with the Divine. Since work is an indispensable part of our life, this theory can be successfully applied to our day-to-day life. In short, we have to divinise our everyday work.

### ***The Capacity of the Mind***

One question may assail every spiritual aspirant in this regard. Meditation gives a higher direction, an inward tendency to all our cravings and urges. How are we to keep our mind fixed on God while doing secular work? Of all the works we do, most are just mechanical, repetitive. After some time, they become automatic and do not

need much concentration. With such works it is not at all difficult to keep another part of the mind fixed on divine thought. The mind has immense capacity. It can divide itself into many compartments according to its different engagements. Swamiji had developed this capacity even when he was a school-going child. With one part of the mind he would listen to the teacher's lecture while with another part he would tell stories to his friends to the consternation of his teacher. Though it appears to be an outstanding feat, in everyday life we find a speck of this trait in many. In answer to a relevant question, Sri Ramakrishna has illustrated through the following common experience from daily life:

Shrish: It is extremely difficult to proceed toward God while leading the life of a householder.

Master: Why so? What about the yoga of practice? At Kamarpukur I have seen the women of the carpenter families selling flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are while doing their business. The pestle of the husking-machine that flattens the paddy constantly falls into the hole of the mortar. The woman turns the paddy in the hole with one hand and with the other holds her baby on her lap as she nurses it. In the mean time customers arrive. The machine goes on pounding the paddy, and she carries on her bargains with the customers. She says to them, 'Pay the few pennies you owe me before you take anything more'. You see, she has all these things to do at the same time—nurse the baby, turn the paddy as the pestle pounds it, take the flattened rice out of the hole, and talk to the buyers. This is called the yoga of practice.<sup>5</sup>

### **Transmutation of Work**

Of course, keeping the mind fixed on God amidst all engagements is a lot more difficult task than we can imagine, especially when the engagement is of an intellectual type or involves

more concentration and alertness than usual. But such work is few and far between. Still, to satisfy the questioner, it can be said in this context that through sustained practice the awareness can be made to reach out to God. If every piece of work can be performed with the thought that it belongs to the most beloved, every moment of our life can be transformed into a bliss, not of satisfaction in work but of union with God. In such work there is no compartmental division between the work and the Divine; the work itself gets merged into the Divine so that one has no difficulty or qualms of conscience to remember God at fixed hours of the day as a Being separate from the work. This is a kind of transmutation of work.

What about the dealings with evil-minded people? God is present everywhere, true, but a crooked fellow cannot be dealt with softness on that score. The idea is that for the time being we should hold back our innocence and simplicity and show the opponent that we also wield the power to upset like the hissing, and not biting, of a snake. This is in no way unspiritual. Spirituality is too comprehensive an idea to preclude anything. Generally, we nurture peculiar ideas in the name of spirituality. We feel, and sometimes even quote from scriptures at random to bolster their statements, that a spiritual person should possess unmitigated forgiveness, tolerance, temperance, and so on at all costs. But that is only one profile of the picture.

Examples are not lacking wherein highly elevated souls, even persons of God, made exemplar exceptions to this idea by fighting out the 'antibodies' that tend to disintegrate the society. Sri Krishna, who is eulogised in the Bhagavata as 'a complete representation of God in human body',<sup>6</sup> displayed many such exploits. Even Sri Ramachandra was no exception. But all the same, their divinity never looked pale in

front of such activity. The long and the short of it is that even our secular activities can be divinised by changing our attitude to the work at hand, towards ourselves, and towards the world. This is what we should learn from the lives of divine personalities.

However, at an advanced stage of spiritual practice the secular merges into the sublime. Then the temple, the farmyard, the factory, or the laboratory—all equally become places of communion with the Divine. Even the aspirant cannot tell when and how this strange transformation took place. The practice of mindfulness in Zen Buddhism, the ‘tea ceremony’ in Japan, Vipassana meditation, and all such practices point to the awareness of being one’s own self. The real process of awareness takes place imperceptibly.

There goes a story of a greedy man who had heard that there was a philosopher’s stone lying among the shingles on the seashore. In a fit of craze he set himself to the task of searching it out. Wearing an iron belt round his waist, he picked the shingles one by one, touched them to the iron belt, and threw away. Days and months and years passed till he lost outer consciousness and went on with the repetitive process, oblivious of the iron belt which had by then turned gold at the touch of the desired stone. But the man was not aware of it. He came to know of it much later, when people pointed out his iron-turned-gold belt. But it was too late then.

Sri Ramakrishna was a non-dualist par excellence. He was one of those extremely rare souls who came back from the topmost level of realisation only to teach others to feel the immanence of God. From the Vedantic idea of immanence and transcendence of the same reality, Sri Ramakrishna made a powerful philosophy of life which may be called ‘communing with the Transcendent in the form of the Immanent’.

Though it was not invented by him, he placed this age-old idea of the Vedic harmony of life before the modern generation to fit well into the warp and weft of its work culture. This idea was not alien even to the earlier mystics of Christianity. Jan Van Ruysbroeck, a Christian mystic of the thirteenth century, expressed this with his characteristic transparency: ‘If you are ravished in ecstasy as highly as St. Peter or St. Paul or as anybody you like, and if you hear that a sick man is in need of hot soup, I counsel you to wake from your ecstasy and warm the soup for him. Leave God to serve God: find Him and serve Him in His members; you will lose nothing by the change.’<sup>7</sup>

### **‘Don’t be Selfish, My Child’**

One day, Sri Ramakrishna reproached his beloved disciple Narendranath who badgered him for an unbroken state of absorption in God. That state is ordinarily known as the highest to be aspired for. But Sri Ramakrishna came forward to correct his disciple that there are higher stages yet. ‘Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation.’<sup>8</sup> It is true that the state known as absolute Oneness is extremely difficult and rare to attain. But having attained this state, the aspirant finds that the whole world of phenomena is saturated in that Oneness. The same existence is scintillating through all the manifested beings.

This is, however, the case with those who have achieved the goal. What about the vast majority who are on their way to it? For them the means has to merge in the goal. Acharya Shankara, while commenting on the traits of a liberated soul in the fifty-fourth verse of the second chapter of the Gita, said: ‘In all spiritual contexts, the

traits of an illumined person act as the means for the aspirant.' In other words, the mental state that one wants to attain has to be practised as a means of attaining that very state. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated this idea throughout his life.

Once Sri Ramakrishna was on a pilgrimage accompanied by Mathuranath, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani and the heir to her large property, along with a huge entourage. On their way the party halted at Deoghar to visit the Vaidyanath Dham. There Sri Ramakrishna witnessed the appalling sight of the famished, ill-nourished, poor villagers begging piteously for a morsel of food. His sensitive heart melted and with tears he implored the rich Mathuranath to feed the poor villagers. When the latter demurred, pointing to the huge expenditure ahead, Sri Ramakrishna became uncompromising in his resolve and refused to move from there. In other words, he chose to 'leave God to serve God'. He did it not to pacify any false emotion as is generally aroused in ordinary souls; he did it from the depth of his realisation of the all-pervasiveness of God.

Innumerable examples show that such feeling was not a momentary outburst of emotion in Sri Ramakrishna. Gauri-Ma, a spiritually evolved ascetic lady-devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, used to come to Dakshineswar. Finding her daring spirit of renunciation, one day Sri Ramakrishna cryptically initiated her into the service of God in womenfolk of India. He said to her playfully, 'Gauri, let me pour water and you knead the mud'. At first she failed to make out the implication and said, 'There is no clay here. How can I knead the mud? This place is full of stone chips.' To this Sri Ramakrishna laughed out and said, 'My goodness! What I meant and what you have understood! The condition of women in this country is very poor and painful. You will have to work for



Gauri-Ma

them.'<sup>9</sup> This shows that Sri Ramakrishna used to teach his disciples to advance in their spiritual journey, from the limited idea of worshipping God within the heart to serving God outside in so many forms. It was a training in supreme meditative awareness for the highest spiritual realisation.

Another instance that bears mention here is his instruction to Swami Adbhutananda, well-known as Latu Maharaj. One evening the latter was trying to meditate at Panchavati whereupon Sri Ramakrishna awoke him with a nudge and said, 'Look here, Leto, the One on whom you are meditating is now sweating over the flour (meaning Sri Sarada Devi, who was at the time engaged in the culinary chores and badly needed an assistant)'.<sup>10</sup> This is another outstanding example of 'leaving God to serve God'.

### **Protecting the Self Through Renunciation**

The first mantra of the *Isha Upanishad* beautifully enlightens us in this line. After instructing the aspirant to ‘envelop everything sentient and insentient with God’, the Upanishad reiterates, ‘protect the Self through that renunciation.’ This appears to be a highly paradoxical statement to a layperson, for, the question immediately crops up: ‘How can one protect the Self and renounce simultaneously?’ Acharya Shankara clarified this riddle in his commentary on this mantra. He said: ‘It means through detachment (and not abandonment); for, a son or a servant, when abandoned or dead, does not protect one since they have no connection with oneself’. The Self, the Atman, has to be nourished and protected at the cost of all other worldly enjoyments.

If you want to get a higher or more precious thing, you must be ready to sacrifice the lower and cheap objects of enjoyment. Leave one to get the other. When a small child holds fast to her or his bosom a bauble or a toy of no value, ascribing a high significance to it, what adults do is to assure the child of a better stuff. The child then leaves aside the toys on one’s own. In the same vein, when the soul is assured of a more sublime enjoyment it will naturally throw away the mundane pleasures.

Meditation often gives rise to a false vanity. It so happens only when meditation is practised as a technique for relaxation and with the idea of exclusiveness. In striking contrast, realisation is a unique experience of comprehensiveness. There is nothing wherein God is not. ‘Whose presence makes even this inert world bubble with life like the enlivening of a rope into a snake in illusion’, goes a Sanskrit psalm.<sup>11</sup>

### **Idea of Universal Liberation**

Swamiji was a champion of this concept of ‘leaving God to serve God’ initiated by his master. He was beside himself with the vastness of this

idea and left no stone unturned in its successful implementation. In a large number of letters written to his brother disciples from abroad he thundered in this refrain: ‘If you want any good to come, just throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the Living God, the Man-god—every being that wears a human form—God in his universal as well as individual aspect. The universal aspect of God means this world, and worshipping it means serving it—this indeed is work, not indulging in ceremonials.’<sup>12</sup>

In May 1898 the dangerous epidemic of plague wreaked havoc on Calcutta. People were fleeing for life. Swamiji inspected the whole situation himself and ordered for relief operations. The monks and the laity joined shoulders to dive in. But where was the fund to come from? Without a moment’s hesitation, Swamiji said: ‘Why, we shall sell the newly-bought Math grounds, if necessary! We are sanniyasis; we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily Bhiksha [alms] as we did before. What! Should we care for Math and possessions when by disposing of them we could relieve thousands suffering before our eyes!’<sup>13</sup> This shows how passionate he was to serve the afflicted, the needy, even by abandoning the only source of comfort and shelter for so many monks. Towards the end of his life, Swamiji told one of his disciples in the same tone:

What is the good of that spiritual practice or realisation which does not benefit others, does not conduce to the well-being of people sunk in ignorance and delusion, does not help in rescuing them from the clutches of lust and wealth? Do you think, so long as one Jiva [individual soul] endures in bondage, you will have any liberation? So long as he is not liberated—it may take several lifetimes—you will have to be born to help him, to make him realise Brahman. Every Jiva is part of yourself—which is the rationale of all work for others. As you desire the

whole-hearted good of your wife and children, knowing them to be your own, so when a like amount of love and attraction for every Jiva will awaken in you, then I shall know that Brahman is awakening in you, not a moment before. When this feeling of the all-round good of all without respect for caste or colour will awaken in your heart, then I shall know you are advancing towards the ideal.<sup>14</sup>

The composite motto which is the basis of all the philosophy behind the Ramakrishna Movement, namely, '*Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha*; for one's liberation and for the good of the world', was formulated by Swamiji keeping in mind this idea of participation in the diverse manifestation of the Divine. It is only an extension of the service of God in human being as exemplified by Sri Ramakrishna. Only those who have struck a balance between their meditative life and the spirit of doing good to others are eligible for this motto. Those who are either too introvert or too extrovert cannot succeed in this endeavour under any circumstance. Just as the meaning of the phrase mentioned in the context of *Isha Upanishad* does not imply any negative, pessimistic type of renunciation, so also this motto does not point to any philanthropic drive at the cost of one's personal life. Service to others should be rendered in such a spirit as will not cause exhaustion, fatigue, or depression, nor even any sense of void within. Only those who are full within can render effective service to others. The motto of the Ramakrishna Movement means doing good to the world in a way that is conducive to the well-being of oneself. It is like a two-way traffic; one is complementary to the other.

### **Acharya Shankara's Concept of Work**

Acharya Shankara is generally assumed to have decried the importance of work and to have given supremacy to *jnana*, knowledge, over everything

else. This is a wrong notion based on garbled conceptions. He said that mere mechanical repetition of the elaborate rituals by rote cannot lead to liberation. Hence, he never attempted a mutual harmony between knowledge and action in the ritual sense and relegated work to one corner. But a careful study of his life shows that he himself was a worker par excellence. In the short span of thirty-two years of his temporal existence what a stupendous volume of work he has done! He even gave a sublime turn to the ritual worship by introducing the worship of five deities, *panchayatana* puja—Ganesha, Shiva, Surya, Narayana, and Shakti, in addition to the worship of guru—as preliminary to the worship of any deity.

Only when it came to the question of liberation directly through the performance of work, he stood adamant and declared that it was knowledge alone that led to liberation. What he meant was that work done as a means to knowledge will end up in knowledge and will disappear of itself, just as clouds disappear after showering rain. The task he left as a legacy for posterity was to go beyond work through the right attitude towards work. His disciple Sureshvaracharya termed it *naishkarmya-siddhi*.

### **Sri Ramakrishna and the Do-gooder**

Sri Ramakrishna's proposition of doing good to the afflicted and suffering does not tally with the Buddhist view of serving others. The Buddha made God otiose in the service to others whereas Sri Ramakrishna made God the *raison d'être* of life, of work, and of everything. According to him, the principle of 'leaving God to serve God' can be applied only to those who have drunk neck-deep of the nectar of God's bliss.

In Swamiji's motto for the Ramakrishna Movement, this idea of Sri Ramakrishna has been intensified. That is why the mention of one's own liberation comes first in the phrase.

This motto is by far different from the concept of selfless social service, which is easier said than done. Except for a person of the Buddha's stature, very few can do work for work's sake alone. There must be lurking somewhere an ulterior motive. And this degrades work to secular nature which Acharya Shankara looked down upon as the source of bondage.


Sri Ramakrishna heartily hailed those who rendered some kind of service to the needy. But wherever his penetrating eyes espied the motives for name, fame, or the like, he would sternly dissuade the person from such endeavour, saying: 'If you realize God, you will get everything else. First God, then charity, doing good to others, doing good to the world, and redeeming people.'<sup>15</sup> To another devotee he said, 'Suppose God appears before you; will you pray to Him, then, for such things as schools and dispensaries and hospitals?' (780). These words do not counter his premises of 'leave God to serve God' in the least. It is just as Prahlada said in reply to his indignant father's question, 'Yes, father, Hari indeed pervades the entire universe, even this pillar'. Upanishads exhaust their words to tell the experiences of the seers in describing God in this way: 'It is full above, below, as also in the middle. It is of the nature of goodness. This direct perception is verily called samadhi of the supreme type.'<sup>16</sup>

We shall conclude our topic with a quotation of Sri Ramakrishna as narrated by the renowned French litterateur, Romain Rolland, in his biographical sketch of Swamiji. This will further clarify all that we have said in this context so far:

'Come down! Come down!' Ramakrishna said in order to bring himself back from ecstasy, and he reproached himself and refused to have the happiness attained in union with God so that he might render service to others: 'O Mother, let me not attain these delights, let me remain

in my normal state, so that I can be of more use to the world!'<sup>17</sup>

And this very idea found expression in the passionate words of Swamiji in one of his letters to Mary Hale written from Almora:

May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.<sup>18</sup> 

## References

1. See Gita, 12.4.
2. Bhagavata, 3.29.21, 22.
3. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2004), 605.
4. See *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.11.
5. *Gospel*, 367.
6. Bhagavata, 1.3.28.
7. Quoted in Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, trans. E F Malcom-Smith (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009), 181.
8. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 69.
9. Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived with God* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002), 163.
10. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2011), 409.
11. Acharya Shankara, *Parabrahma-Pratahsmarana-stotram*, 3: 'Yasminnidam jagadashesham asheshamurtau, rajjvam bhujangama iva pratibhasitam vai.'
12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.264.
13. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.328.
14. *Complete Works*, 7.235–6.
15. *Gospel*, 615.
16. *Muktikopanishad*, 2.56.
17. *The Life of Vivekananda*, 181.
18. *Complete Works*, 5.137.



# ***Srivaishnava and Dvaita Vedanta Polemics and Interpretations of the Ramayana as a Bhakti Text***

**Cameron M Wright**

**I**N BOTH THE Tenkalai sect of Srivaishnava Vishishtadvaita Vedanta and in the Dvaita Vedanta school of Madhvacharya, in particular in the work of Vadiraja, episodes of the Ramayana are cited as scriptural authority to indicate the supremacy of Vishnu in the pantheon of gods, the hierarchy of souls, and the distinctness of individual souls both from Vishnu and among one another. All individual souls are dependent on Vishnu both in their creation as well as in the need for his grace in order to achieve ultimate liberation in moksha.

I want to explore the relationship between these two similar yet divergent schools of thought, and indicate some possible theological motivations for their mutual reliance on the authority of the Ramayana. Both schools espouse devotion to Vishnu, of whom Sri Ramachandra is an avatara, incarnation. I want to weigh the theological similarities and differences between the two to help illuminate how it is that an epic text is used as scriptural authority to support theological positions in these Vaishnava groups.

The Srivaishnava author Manavalamamuni

(d. 1443) espoused doctrines which characterise what later became known as the Tenkalai school. In his view, the relationship between the individual soul and the ultimate divinity, as well as the means to achieving moksha, is not characterised by a mere relationship of bhakti or devotion. The proper relationship between the Lord and the soul is characterised specifically by *prapatti*, total surrender. This relation of surrender is mapped out by the concept of the soul's nature as *svarupa-yathatmya*, which indicates that the soul is both dependent on Vishnu as the supreme Brahman, as well as an exclusive object of his pleasure.

Vishnu bestows salvation to a soul in light of its initial selfless effort, but only insofar as it pleases him. The actions of a soul by its own effort do not lead directly to salvation. Vishnu will remain indifferent and unmerciful to a soul who is motivated by self-interested intent on one's own salvation. Only selfless devotion with an attitude of dependence on and surrender to the Lord will please him enough to grant mercy and allow a soul to get moksha. 'It is when the soul ceases his own efforts upon realizing his true dependence that the Lord ceases His indifference and steps in as the active agent in salvation.'<sup>1</sup>

It is through the realisation of complete dependence on the Lord that a soul is able to attain the requisite state of selflessness required for complete surrender. The benefit of salvation is not an outcome of the effort of the soul. True salvation cannot be the product of such egoistic desire. The only role the soul takes in its own salvation is complete passivity to the Lord. 'Salvation comes from realization of the soul's true dependence on the Lord, not from any activity' (57). It is consistent with this view that it would be presumptive of any human soul to believe that their own effort and petitioning could be sufficient to incite the supreme Lord and creator of

the universe, Vishnu, to action. There is nothing external to him with sufficient power to sway him to act in favour of anyone in spite of his independent will. He may choose not to bestow mercy, if it is not in his plan for a given soul.

The *svarupa* or essential nature of the soul is characterised by the following characteristics: *jnana*, knowledge; *ananda*, bliss; *kartritva*, doership; *bhoktritva*, enjoyership; *jnatritva*, knowership; *sheshatva*, subservience (44–7). *Svarupa* is contrasted to *svarupa-yathatmya* in that *svarupa* is only knowledge of one's subservience to Vishnu.

Knowledge, will, and effort are dependent on Vishnu in order to result in action. Only his permission actualises the effort initiated by a human soul. This illustrates what is most fundamental to the essence of the soul, *sheshatva*, subservience. Sentience or *jnatritva* is what distinguishes individual souls from matter. *Sheshatva* is what distinguishes souls from Vishnu. *Jnana* and *ananda* are like the outer shells of the atomic-sized souls. They are not internal attributes, but external ones. The 'internal, essential description' of souls, *sheshatva*, indicates that the relation of the soul to Vishnu is that of a mode of Him (48).

To bear out this relationship, it will help to explain the position of the *sheshi* and the *shesha*, which characterise the dependence of the soul on the Lord. According to Patricia Y Mumme, the *sheshi* is the one who is 'master' or 'owner'. 'In Śrīvaiṣṇava usage the *śeṣa-śeṣī* relationship is most often illustrated in terms of the subservience of a slave to his master' (41). The attitude or intention of being of use or contributing excellence to is directed towards the *sheshi* by the *shesha*. The *shesha* is the 'subordinate' or the 'remainder' the nature of which is to be subservient.

Valerie Stoker says that according to Vishishtadvaita, 'souls are subsidiary parts (*śeṣas*) to Viṣṇu's great whole (*śeṣin*); the souls in

Viśiṣṭādvaita are like the body of God and thus are not completely identical with His perfect, transcendent nature. Souls exist to serve the Lord in the same way that the body exists to serve the soul.<sup>2</sup> The *sheshin* is that which is the ‘great whole’ or the soul of Vishnu. The *shesha* is a subsidiary part, a dependent component or mode of Vishnu. This dependent component is the individual soul, which exists only to serve the Lord.

### **Some Tenkalai Uses of Passages from the Ramayana**

This relationship of complete dependence and subordination between the *shesha* and *sheshi* is foundational to the distinction between two types of soteriological practice: bhakti, devotion, and *prapatti*, surrender. For the Tenkalai Srivaishnavas, *prapatti* is a sufficient means for salvation. They do not regard bhakti as a necessity. Rather, bhakti is only a means available to twice-born males and requires a significant study of important texts and repetitions of ritual practices. *Prapatti* on the other hand is available to anyone, in spite of caste, education, or gender.<sup>3</sup>

This practice of complete surrender makes it possible to achieve moksha in a given lifetime. For the Tenkalai in particular, the *varna*, broadly translated as ‘caste’, is not a rigid barrier to anyone who would seek salvation, even in the current lifetime. Caste distinctions are not rejected outright by the Tenkalai, but they allow for ‘flexible boundaries ruled ultimately by devotion.’<sup>4</sup> For Manavalamamuni, bhakti is useful for one operating at the state where one is merely aware of one’s *svarupa* or essential nature as subservient to Vishnu. At this level, one can only engage in bhakti practice through self-effort and motivated by self-interest. Through *prapatti*, one acts with full knowledge of one’s nature as *svarupa-yathatmya*, as subservient and

an object of the Lord’s pleasure, without self-purpose. One submits passively to one’s nature as subservient and useful and pleasurable to the Lord. ‘For Maṇavālamāmuni, bhaktiyoga is to be relinquished upon realizing the higher truth of the svarūpayāthātmya, the soul’s utter dependence on the Lord.’<sup>5</sup>

*Prapatti* provides one sufficient means of liberation, without need for additional recourses to other means such as bhakti. One instance from the Ramayana cited by an early Tenkalai commentator Pillai Lokacharya (1205–1311) shows that when Ravana desired to withdraw from battle with Sri Ramachandra, he was not granted the ability to retreat as long as he retained hold of his bow. Only when Ravana dropped his bow did Sri Ramachandra allow Ravana to withdraw. This is supposed to show that, as long as one engages in alternative means of salvation besides surrender, those means only prove to be impediments to allowing the Lord himself to save you. Another episode for Pillai is that of Dasharatha, who was committed to both truthfulness to his wife and the boons she demanded, as well as enjoying the pleasure of living with Sri Ramachandra and having him to be the king of Ayodhya. By submitting to his wife’s wishes instead of his best intentions for Sri Ramachandra, Dasharatha suffered heartache and death. This is akin to an illusory means of attaining the Lord’s favour instead of continuing in a position of surrender to him from the outset. Pillai Lokacharya says that ‘foolishly clinging to such false upāyas [as bhaktiyoga and other śāstric dharmas] actually interferes with attainment of the Lord’ (83).

### **Madhvacharya’s Scriptural Canon and Liberal Interpretation**

The Dvaita or dualist school of Vedanta was founded by Madhvacharya (1238–1317). Madhvacharya’s distinctive form of Vedanta

‘emphasized the abiding reality of difference, particularly that between the ultimate reality Brahman ... and individual human souls.’<sup>6</sup> A controversial interpreter of the Vedas, Madhvacharya took special liberties with the scope and the textual meanings of important Vedic passages.

In his interpretation of the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, he infamously takes the phrase *tat tvam asi*, which is usually translated as ‘you are that’, and alters the meaning to indicate ‘you are *not* that’. He takes the full phrase *atma tat tvam asi*, and carries over the *a* from *atma*, making the phrase *atmatat tvam asi*, making the *tat* into *atat*, thereby negating it and making the phrase a negation of the monistic identity, which is often taken to be the meaning of the phrase. Madhvacharya ‘denies any identity between the individual human soul, or *ātman*, and the ultimate reality Brahman.’<sup>7</sup> This bolsters his dualism and shows his motivation to establish the difference and the superiority of Vishnu as the highest expression or equation of Brahman.

Madhvacharya also extends the scope of the range of texts which bear Vedic authority to include not only the Vedas and Upanishads and the typically accepted *Brahma Sutra*, but also texts such as the *Pancharatra Agamas*, *Vaishnava Puranas*, and the two great epics which include the Ramayana. ‘Furthermore, he claims that all of these traditions are *sadāgamas* or “true traditions” that can serve as a source of knowledge of the ultimate reality Viṣṇu’ (57). Madhvacharya’s willingness to liberally expand and interpret the Vedas seems in part to be motivated by his belief in ‘Veda’s unique beginninglessness ... [and] authorlessness’ (55).

Madhvacharya asserted that he was an ‘Avatāra of Vāyu’. The god Vayu is the son of Vishnu.<sup>8</sup> He was also held in suspicion for making unverifiable quotes from untraceable sources.

Madhvacharya’s ‘description [of Vāyu] substantially differs from the traditional specification of the personality of the god Vāyu’ (109).

This characterises the overall approach of subsequent Dvaita thinkers in interpreting texts. Other styles of texts are rendered with the authority similar to Shrutis or revealed texts. Some Smritis or remembered texts are held as having equal authority as the Vedas, or at least providing authoritative clarifications. Madhvacharya’s quotations from some unknown Shrutis are even possible fabrications on his part. Vyasa-tirtha (1478–1539) readily relies on some of Madhvacharya’s unknown passages in his own Dvaita objections to Vishishtadvaita positions. This open-ended interpretation and reliance on questionable and possibly fabricated passages shows a point of weakness in the claims Vyasa-tirtha poses against the Vishishtadvaita.<sup>9</sup>

Among the claims which mark the contrast with the Vishishtadvaita Srivaishnavas is the view Dvaita Vedanta takes towards bhakti as a sufficient and preferred method of attaining liberation. According to Vyasa-tirtha, since bhakti requires more effort than *prapatti*, it warrants a higher reward in the state of moksha. For Srivaishnavas, this does not hold because *prapatti* actually demonstrates a higher degree of faith on the part of the practitioner and thereby requires less effort on their part. The need to engage in greater effort through bhakti betrays a weaker faith and thereby necessitates the additional effort through repetitious bhakti.

Vyasa-tirtha would have it that the extra effort and repetition required for bhakti demonstrates an equal measure of faith. For Vyasa-tirtha, mere *prapatti* for Vishnu’s grace is unfair and shows failure for having fulfilled Vedic injunctions. An innovation which helps resolve this issue for the Dvaita school makes allowance for

different levels of faith and effort in light of the plurality and hierarchy of souls. According to Vyasaṭirṭha, allowing that grace and salvation are bestowed by Vishnu equally to those who perform the lesser means of *prapatti*, and hence that those souls attain the same state of moksha would be unfair.

The greater effort put forth in bhakti should involve a greater reward. Actions prescribed by the Vedas are supposed to be followed in order to achieve certain ends for salvation. If a person follows the proper prescriptions of bhakti and another merely suffices with surrender, even in the light of caste position, the one who engages in proper bhakti will attain a more favourable state in moksha. 'Vyāsaṭirṭha makes it clear that in his view the *bhakti* path is more arduous than the *prapatti* one because it requires the agent to perform certain tasks repeatedly' (118). Dvaita 'maintained that souls would be hierarchically arranged in *mokṣa*, in part because their innate differences would determine the method, or the type of *sādhana*, they would use to attain liberation' (109). These distinctions will remain the same even in the state of moksha in light of the means whereby each soul achieved moksha.

### **Episodes from the Ramayana in Vadiraja's Nyayaratnavali**

Vadiraja of the sixteenth century, in keeping with the Dvaita tradition as a disciple of Vyasaṭirṭha,<sup>10</sup> seeks to establish that all souls exist as unique and distinct from one another, and that there is a hierarchy among all souls. In addition to commentarial and polemical works, Vadiraja was famous as a composer of devotional songs in Kannada and was 'also a devout Dāsa in the line of famous Dāsas' (194).

He has composed a polemical poem directed against the Advaita Vedanta of Acharya

Shankara. The poetic virtuosity and clever rhetorical attacks on his opponents makes this work by Vadiraja amongst the most exciting and expressive in the Dvaita literature. It stands out from the work of his guru, Vyasaṭirṭha, whose work, B N K Sharma, points out to be 'too learned and stiff to be of use to general readers'.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the project of refuting the monism and illusionism of Advaita Vedanta in the *Nyayaratnavali*, Vadiraja more specifically sets out to establish the superiority of Vishnu over all other gods. Stafford Betty translates: 'Moreover, Kṛṣṇa is well known as "superior in intelligence to Brahmā, Śiva (Rudra), and the rest". And since Brahmā and the rest are for that very reason proven to be inferior in intelligence, then the intelligence of souls and the Supreme (Lord) was, to say the least, different!'<sup>12</sup>

In this case, Sri Krishna being an incarnation of Vishnu is the the highest deity. Vishnu is 'superior in intelligence' and 'it is wrong to identify Viṣṇu's intelligence with any soul's, from Brahmā on down' (ibid.). Vishnu is the representation of the highest Brahman and he resides at the top of the hierarchy, above all other souls, including gods. All the gods, including Brahma and Shiva, are 'completely dependent on' him 'for deliverance from the powers of evil' (4). He permits them to fulfil their respective roles within the hierarchy. Vadiraja sets out to demonstrate that the epics and puranas bear this relationship of hierarchy out.

Vadiraja draws on the story of Sri Ramachandra to specifically establish this hierarchy of the gods. When Sri Ramachandra slayed Ravana, it brought a salute from Brahma, Shiva, and all else who were there. This episode is supposed to not only demonstrate Vishnu's supremacy, but the acquiescence of his supremacy by the other gods, Brahma and Shiva in particular.

In the commentary of Vadiraja's text provided

by Betty along with his translation, he somewhat incorrectly notes that Sri Ramachandra slayed his foe with a straw, referring to Ravana. Unable to find the specific reference to the *kakasura* or crow-demon for whom the straw was used in retaliation, Betty refers the instance back to Ravana, 'especially since "kāka" often means "contemptuous", to Rāvana' (ibid.).

In the translation of Valmiki's Ramayana by Arshia Sattar, we find the episode of Sri Ramachandra and the crow, when Sita retold the episode to Hanuman, who came to her in Ravana's palace to see her speak on Sri Ramachandra's behalf. Here, Sita recalls how the crow flew down and attacked her. The crow was carrying a piece of meat and clawed at her and pulled off her clothes. She retreated to a laughing Sri Ramachandra for protection. He promptly took the straw and invoked Brahma's weapon, sending the straw virtually chasing the crow all through the three worlds until out of desperation and exhaustion the crow gives up and seeks surrender to Sri Ramachandra. The unstoppable weapon ultimately injured the crow. Nonetheless, the crow parted from Sri Ramachandra thankfully. Sita expressed distress over Sri Ramachandra's anger and vengeance, and further honoured him for his ultimate compassion.<sup>13</sup>

### **Spiritual and Gender Hierarchy in the Ramayana**

For the Tenkalai Srivaishnavas, the episode of Sita and the *kakasura* shows something fundamental about the relationship between Sri Ramachandra and Sita. Sita, who represents Sri, the wife and companion of Vishnu, acts as a mediator between him and individual souls. She displays mercy and petitions on behalf of those who approach the Lord in surrender so that he may bestow mercy on them. She convinces Sri

Ramachandra 'into accepting a soul who has come for refuge, much as a wife and mother pleads with her husband to forgive and not punish their child'.<sup>14</sup>

An earlier Tenkalai commentator, Pillai Lokacharya says that in the case of the crow, it was the mere presence of Sita and her distress over his suffering that encouraged Sri Ramachandra to show him mercy. Lokacharya says: 'Because of her presence, the crow was saved. Because of her absence, Ravana was destroyed.'<sup>15</sup> Lokacharya goes so far as to claim that the 'main purpose of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is to show the superior nature of Śrī, incarnate as Sītā, and the importance of her mediation'.<sup>16</sup>

The Tenkalai school largely views Sri as a distinct and finite soul, who is separate from the Lord. She stands in subservience to the Lord, but still is superior to individual souls. She is usually positioned as a wife and a mother, which 'would strongly suggest that she is a distinct *jīva*' (237). Sita and Sri Ramachandra's relationship in the Ramayana is not only exemplary of their own distinctness and Sita's subservience, but further, of the nature of the soul and its subservient relation to the Lord.

Lokacharya in his *Srivachana Bhushana* lists six qualities which Sita, the 'best of women' possesses. The six qualities characterise the true nature of the soul, which are not apparent due to the shrouding of ignorance. These six qualities of Sita are: 1) She is *shesha* or subservient to Sri Ramachandra; 2) She has no other delight than Sri Ramachandra; 3) She has no refuge other than Sri Ramachandra; 4) She is in union with him, as in marriage; 5) She cannot bear separation from him, as when she was alone in the grove of Ravana; 6) She must be saved only by Sri Ramachandra (238).<sup>17</sup>

We find in the Ramayana, after Sri Ramachandra has fought and killed Ravana and

rescued Sita, as the two are going to be reunited, Sita bathes and dresses to approach Sri Ramachandra with humility and adoration. To everyone's surprise and dismay, Sri Ramachandra informs her that his only obligation in saving her was to defeat the enemy and to restore his family's honour. He questions her purity, having been alone with Ravana for such a long time. He sends Sita away to go wherever she wants to.

Out of desperation and hopelessness, Sita demands Lakshmana to build a funeral pyre for her. Believing her husband to have acted merely out of cruelty and failure to recognise her virtue, Sita wishes to end her life. Sita bowed her head in honour of Sri Ramachandra, the gods, and the brahmanas. Sita steps into the fire, and to the amazement of all, she sat in the arms of the god of fire unharmed. As Sita is returned to him from the fire, Sri Ramachandra acknowledges that Sita remained pure, and that his rejection of her was merely to prove this to the rest of the world and that he was not a weak ruler.<sup>18</sup>

This distressing and confounding episode is, in light of the Tenkalai theology, more usefully viewed as a prime example of the relationship that the human soul has with Vishnu. Sita, in her position after the funeral pyre, is proven to be completely pure. This episode makes evident that Sita exemplifies all of the six qualities or *bhushana* ascribed to her. On the terms of the Tenkalai, Sita is not saved or ultimately accepted by Sri Ramachandra by her own merit, however. She is saved due to the fact that it was within Sri Ramachandra's own desire that she be saved and her purity displayed. Sita having been rescued and accepted back by Sri Ramachandra provides an image of the human soul having the shroud of ignorance removed, with its true nature as subordinate, protected by,

united with, and awaiting or gaining salvation from the Lord.

Surrounding this same episode of Sita's rejection and trial by fire is the response of the gods to Sri Ramachandra's greatness. As a way of admonishing him, the gods Kubera, Yama, Indra, Varuna, Shiva, and Brahma came down and collectively spoke: 'You are the creator of the worlds and the foremost of the wise! How could you let Sita walk into the fire? Don't you know that you are the greatest among the gods?' (636).

Here it appears that these gods are admitting that Sri Ramachandra, as Vishnu, is the supreme among them. Brahma himself goes on to further the admonishment with claims to Sri Ramachandra's greatness and superiority. He acknowledges that Sri Ramachandra is Brahman and the supreme dharma. He identifies him with Vishnu as well as the source and upholder of the worlds, and the point into which the worlds dissolve. Along with many other superlative praises, Brahma claims that the gods are inseparable from Sri Ramachandra and that the entire world is his body (636–7).

Vadiraja takes up these claims and the display of praise from the other gods as a proof of Vishnu's supremacy. With particular attention directed at Shiva, Vadiraja takes special pleasure at the fact that Shiva is not only praising Vishnu in this case but recognising his true nature as subordinate to Vishnu. What's more, Vadiraja claims in rebuttal to his hypothetical Shaivite Advaitin adversary, that not only does Shiva admit to this subordinate position, but that he would "become furious" at his own devotees for not doing so.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The theological motivations of these two Vaishnava schools of thought are not exclusive or

contradictory, but rather complementary. In Vyasa-tirtha's own Dvaita polemics against the Srivaishnavas, he did not intend so much to refute or merge the two schools, but rather to convince the Srivaishnavas 'the superior suitability of Dvaita conclusions to Viśiṣṭādvaita premises'.<sup>20</sup> Both schools espouse hierarchy as fundamental.

The Dvaitins are much more rigid in their view, however, which involves an absolute hierarchical distinction among the gods and between gods and humans. The Dvaita view also asserts a strong distinctness and hierarchy among human souls, which persists even after the attainment of moksha. The Ramayana is a useful resource for both schools, not in its entirety, but by selecting specific episodes which are supposed to justify some theological conviction. Some interpretations may even completely take the episodes out of context with how they fit the entire story.

The Ramayana is perhaps more apt at demonstrating the hierarchy of all beings under the superior authority of Vishnu as Sri Ramachandra. Proving the individuation of souls is perhaps not found in the text but rather read into it. Everything that occurs in the story is centred around or directed towards Sri Ramachandra in some way, either positively or negatively.

Ravana himself is ultimately committed to nothing in the world but Sri Ramachandra, albeit with the intention to defeat him. If we take the often problematic instance of Sita being banished by Sri Ramachandra and walking through the fire, we find that Sri Ramachandra's treatment of Sita in fact embodies a consistent Vaishnava vision of the Lord's relationship to the soul as its ruler, the soul's position as subordinate to his power, and the superior wisdom in the way He chooses to dispense his grace.



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# ***Spirituality, Yoga, Morality, and Religion —A Perspective from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother***

**Dr Bhavesh A Kinkhabwala**

**T**HERE EXISTS a difference between an ordinary life, a religious life, and a spiritual life. Morality is a part of an ordinary life and denotes what is good or bad, moral or immoral, and is connected with the mind, while the mind is attached with the ordinary consciousness. Therefore, morality belonging to the ordinary life aims at a well regulated individual and social life. Accordingly, it becomes indispensable and helps to lead a better, more rational, self-controlled, sympathetic life. Morality has much connection with psychology, which regulates one's physical and vital desires and impulses through willpower. Moral laws are essential so long as one is regulated by the ordinary physical, vital, and mental consciousness.

Besides morality, there are ideals and higher values in life, like serving the needy, the poor, the suffering, one's country, or the humanity at large. Such an ideal involves the subordination of one's ego or the sacrifice of one's personal interests for the wellbeing of others. However, service to others is still at a mental level involving moral aspects and may be done without a spiritual ideal.

The ordinary life means human consciousness ignorant of one's true self and hence is far from the divine. It is led by the general habits and necessities of the mind and body, all centred around the ego with a sense and belief of being a separate individual independent of everything else.

The religious life is a journey of the ignorant human consciousness towards the divine but still without realising the knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed. There are two aspects of religion: exoteric religion comprising outward mechanism of creed, cult, ceremony, and so on; and esoteric religion which seeks the life in the spirit and is concerned with the true inner Self beyond the intellect.

Like morality, exoteric religion is necessary in society. When religion is practised sincerely, knowing its inner essence, then it can become one's jumping-board to the realm of the Spirit.

Religion belongs to the higher mind of humanity. Ordinary daily life allows religion a fixed place on some holy days in the church or temple. One forcibly tries to get away from worldly life to religious life at fixed times in the day or the week when one thinks it right to excuse from mundane affairs to remember and pray to God. Religious life could be the first step towards spiritual life. It offers a kind of support and help to the inner spiritual aspiration. Each religion has helped humankind in one way or the other. Instead of excluding each other, religions ought to fulfil each other. God belongs to the whole creation; no one religion holds the monopoly of divine grace.

Spiritual life begins with the awakening of higher pure consciousness beyond the ordinary physical and mental consciousness that are

based on ignorance and an ego identified with the body-mind complex. Then one realises one's true being and comes into direct living contact and union with the Divine. Spiritual life reaches beyond the mind and enters into the deeper level of consciousness of the spirit and acts based on the ultimate truth of the spirit. This change of pattern and level of consciousness is what the spiritual seeker looks forward to and nothing else matters.

But, at first it is essential to pass through the basic disciplines for the purification of the mind. It is only when the fundamental will and mental power are equally compliant to the higher consciousness that the ordinary human life is exceeded and the true spiritual life begins. In fact, with rare exceptions, it is relatively indispensable to strive for a moral perfection before trying to realise the spiritual ideal at higher level. Family, society, country—all these narrate a larger ego and belong to the mental evolution. Service to others in any manner is an extension of the ego, it does not free one from the ego and therefore falls short of the spiritual ideal which is a total liberation from the ego.

There are two major differences between religion and spirituality. Firstly, religion occupies a fixed place and a portion of life whereas spirituality embraces the whole life, pervading every moment and every action. Secondly, the practice of religion centres chiefly around the performance of certain acts such as worship, rites, rituals, and so on, whereas spirituality essentially implies a change of consciousness. Spirituality begins when one becomes aware of the pure consciousness beyond the ego or mind and learn to live in it or under its influence more and more.

### ***Yoga and Spirituality***

The term yoga in its general sense is synonymous with spirituality. 'Yoga' is a generic name for the

processes and the result of processes by which we transcend our present modes of being and rise to a new, a higher, a wider mode of consciousness beyond the ordinary animal or intellectual man. The supra-cosmic, transcendent unnameable is the source and support of all things. Yoga is exchanging egoism with a universal or cosmic consciousness informed by this source. However, the specific and narrower meaning of 'yoga' is a spiritual path that aims at union, as 'yoga' in Sanskrit means 'union'.

The ultimate goal of yoga is the divine fulfilment of life. Union here implies the realisation of the unity or identity of one's finite being with the infinite. Therefore, in this specific sense, the term 'yoga' applies to those spiritual paths by which the realisation of the union of oneself with the reality is regarded as the goal to be attained. The three principal paths are the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and the path of work. No yoga can be successfully undertaken and followed unless there is a strong awakening to the necessity of that larger spiritual existence.

### ***Philanthropy and Spirituality***

The object of spiritual practices is to live in divine consciousness and to manifest it in life. Similarly, the true object of yoga is not philanthropy but to find the Divine, to enter into the divine consciousness and realise one's true being in the Divine. Altruism, philanthropy, humanitarianism, or service are flowers of the mental consciousness and are at best the mind's limitation of the spiritual flame of universal divine love. True spiritual freedom alone can create a perfect human order.

If one sincerely wants to help others and the world, the best thing one can do is to be oneself what one wants others to be—not only as an example, but because one becomes a centre of radiating power, which by the very

fact that it exists, compels the rest of the world to transform itself.

### Creating One's Own Spiritual Atmosphere

Sri Aurobindo, in his *Letters on Yoga*, says: 'A spiritual atmosphere is more important than outer conditions; if one can get that and also create one's own spiritual air to breathe in and live in it, that is the true condition of progress.'<sup>1</sup>

The Mother says that one can create one's true spiritual atmosphere 'by inner discipline'. She adds:

You can create your atmosphere by controlling your thoughts, ... controlling your actions, turning them exclusively towards the sadhana, abolishing all desires and all useless, external, ordinary activities, living a more intense inner life, and separating yourself from ordinary things, ordinary thoughts, ordinary reactions, ordinary actions; then you create a kind of atmosphere around you. ... If you act only in conformity with what can lead you to the divine realisation, if you abolish in yourself all desires and impulses turned towards external things, if you calm your mental being, appease your vital being, if you shut yourself against suggestions coming from outside and become immune to the action of people surrounding you, you create *such* a spiritual atmosphere that nothing can touch it, and it *no longer* depends *at all* on circumstances or on whom you live with or on the conditions you live in, because you are enclosed in your own spiritual atmosphere. And that is how one obtains it: by turning one's attention *solely* to the spiritual life, by reading only what can help in the spiritual life, by doing only what leads you to the spiritual life and so on. Then you create your own atmosphere. But naturally, if you open all the doors, listen to what people tell you, follow the advice of this one and the inspirations of that one, and are full of desires for outside things, you cannot create a spiritual atmosphere for yourself. You will have an ordinary atmosphere like everybody else.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

All religions and the teachings of all the sages are nothing other than methods to reach the goal and the same is classified into three principal categories: the love of truth and search for the absolute, the love of God, and the love of humanity.

Spirituality does not mean a high level of intellectuality, nor idealism, ethics, moral purity, or austerity. It is neither religiosity nor passionate or glorious emotional feeling, and not even a composite of all these brilliant phenomena. These things certainly have a substantial value for the purification of the mind and thereby lead to spiritual evolution. The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. Real progress is when one no longer has to make an effort to meditate. But the final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation, but in all circumstances and in all the activities of life. If one has a truthful aspiration for spiritual transformation within one's heart, then one will definitely find the way and the master.

It is not always required to discard the householder life for the path of spirituality. It is mostly done by those who intend to draw a clear-cut demarcation and further live an exclusively inner spiritual life. For this purpose, complete renunciation of the world is needed. The life of renunciation becomes indispensable only when an urge for the innermost spiritual being becomes so great that the ordinary life is no longer well-suited. Till then what is essential is a sincere struggle and willpower to practise an inner level isolation and detachment from the worldly affairs.



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# YOUNG EYES

## *Describing God*

**T**o describe God is difficult for everyone, even for grown-ups, what to talk of children. However, we children feel that God is there. Just like a parent. Sometimes, much more than a parent. God is like a loving elder sibling, taking care of all of us, the entire universe. God can do anything and everything and has a huge body, with big hands and feet, and big eyes, and a large, huge head. God is holding the whole world in the hands. God is very tall and it is difficult or impossible to find the height and weight of God. God is not old and not very young and remains in the same age all the time. God likes good people and forgives bad people.

We cannot see God completely, but we do feel or hear God. God cannot be defeated or conquered. God never fails. God is kind to everyone, even to people who are cruel to others. God is perfect and pure. God is like a never-ending story that one wants to read over and again. One does not get bored by this story and every time one listens to this story, one feels great about it. God is everywhere and comes whenever we call from our hearts. God can take any form of any living being or any other object. God lives through every one of us and all our lives are different stories of God.

God is like wind. You cannot see it, but you can feel it and you know what it does. God cannot be seen always, but we can feel God's presence by seeing whatever happens in the world. God is like a river that continuously flows and takes water to everyone. God is like a gentle flower and does not hurt anyone. God loves all

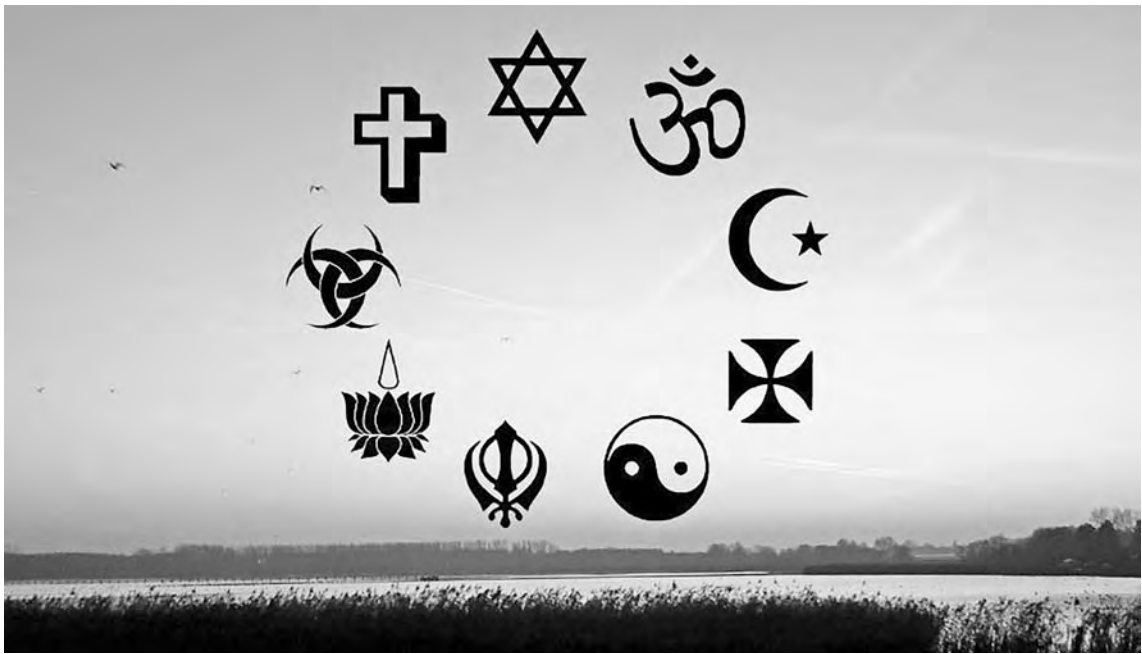
of us and will always love all of us. God will be always with us. God is love.

God is like a light that shines even brighter than the sun. God produces energy. God created the universe and gives life to it. God is the spirit that is the basis of everything and God is also the scripture that we study to understand God. God is like a good fruit that is great to look at from the outside and is also tasty from the inside. God is like the root of a tree. We are all the flowers, fruits, leaves, and branches of this tree. God is the same everywhere and to everyone.

God has giant ears and can hear all sounds, everything that we say. God can hear all the living beings. God does not sleep at all and watches everything and everyone. God lives within everyone. God is friendly to all the living and all those who are dead. God hears us all when we pray just like people hear us over a phone. We can call God all the time. God helps us when we are in trouble.

God is the moral in all our stories. All morality is God. God controls everything. God lives wherever you can imagine. God does whatever you can imagine. You need imagination to believe in God. After death, most people go and join God. God is the heart of every person. God resides in the heart of every person. God is the basic light out of which everything has come.

God speaks to everyone, living or dead, even to the extinct dinosaurs. Sometimes, however, it feels that God is blind and deaf and does not see or hear anything, especially the evil things that happen in the world. This is because of our disbelief. God is always there. God is a powerful



and holy presence in the universe. Children are closer to God than the grown-ups because children have pure hearts.

God wants the world to be peaceful. God wants all of us to stop quarrelling and disagreeing. God has no beginning and no end. God is part of everything because God has made everything. God never dies. God is always dead and always alive. God can make us do everything. We can hear God in our minds and we should listen to this voice all the time. God is a feeling. We do not really know what God is. God is seen by different people in different ways. God is in all things and all religions. God is not just one religion. God is good and bad, all emotions, everything.

We pray to God for other people so that they can get free from their pains and sufferings. We also pray to God when we are scared of something. God does not like greed. God is someone who is all around us and has created us. God knows everything about everyone and everything. We would like to live with God someday. We love God. For praying to God, we have to bring God out of our hearts.

We are blessed just to be in the presence of God. We do not have to do anything to be blessed in this way. We can worship God in any

form or way we like. There is God in us but there is also evil in us. God protects us from evil, both inside and outside us. God destroys evil and the evil-minded. God is visible and invisible, present and absent, seen and hidden. God is human and superhuman. God is like us and very different from us. God is of all gender and of no gender. God is serious and at the same time playful. God is calm and God can also become agitated.

Worshipping God is to have a connection with God. By worshipping God, we remove a heavy burden from our shoulders and put it before God. When we worship God, our problems become smaller and God becomes bigger. To God, our problems are like a piece of candy. Worship is a way of showing our gratitude to God. Everyone in the world is related to one another in some way, because they all have come from God.

Everyone has a different idea about God. What one person thinks about God need not be what the other person thinks about God. It does not matter if different people have different ideas about God. We should respect all beliefs and religions. We should respect each other and then all will be fine.



# BALABODHA

*Ancient Wisdom Made Easy*

## Puja

The word 'puja' is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word 'puja' is worship. However, it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word 'puja' is derived by adding the suffix *a* in the passive voice to the root *puj*. The suffixes of *ang* and *tap* are also added sometimes. The word 'puja' means worship, salute, honour, adore, praise, laud, the ritual of worship, the sixty-four rites of worshipping Shakti, austerities, contemplation, honouring of guru, the worship of weapons and vehicles before war, action, the establishment of the different faces of different forms of Shakti, the aids for doing ritual worship, culture, respect, reverence, homage to superiors, adoration of the gods, and homage.

In the sense of ritual worship, puja can involve a structure with many elaborate steps. The place of worship and the person who does the worship have to be physically clean. The worshipper has to start the puja with a calm and spiritually-oriented pure mind. First, the *avahana* or the invoking of the deity is done. Then, the deity is offered a seat or asana. In the next step of *padya*, the deity's feet are washed, symbolically or physically. Water is also offered for complete washing of the deity's body. *Arghya* is water offered to the deity for washing the mouth. In *snana* or *abhisheka*, water

is symbolically offered for the symbolic bathing of the deity. Then, *vastra* or clothes are given to the deity. Then the sacred thread is put on the deity. Then, perfumes or anointments are applied on the deity through *gandha*. The deity is offered *abharana* or ornaments. The deity is also offered *chhatra* or umbrella. Flowers or *pushpa* are offered to the deity.

Then, *dhupa* or incense is offered to the deity. *Naivedya* or food offering is given to the deity. *Achamaniya* or water is offered for sipping by the deity. A lamp or *arati* is waved before the deity. The deity is offered *chamara* or fly-whisk. The worshipper then prostrates before the deity, thus offering namaskar or pranam. Then, the worshipper does a parikrama or circumambulation of the deity. In some rituals, there is *visarjana* or moving the deity or saying farewell to the deity.

There are various versions of puja based on the number of offerings, like *pancha-upachara* or five offerings, *dasha-upachara* or ten offerings, *shodasha-upachara* or sixteen offerings, or *chatushashthi-upachara* or sixty-four offerings.

Often, the elaborate steps of puja are shortened into a brief and quick version, enabling people without much knowledge of rituals also to be able to perform worship.

Some schools of the Purva-Mimamsa system of philosophy critique the performance of puja and consider it a false ritual because images cannot accept offerings. In Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism, puja is performed on images or pictures of deities.



# TRADITIONAL TALES

## *Dharmadatta's Charity*

(Continued from the previous issue)

**H**ow long can someone live with such a wife? Bhikshu hit upon a plan. He decided to remarry and also found a bride for himself. Kalaka could not bear this news and committed suicide by consuming poison.

The messengers of Lord Yama, the god of death, came to take Kalaka away. They took her to Lord Yama. Lord Yama asked Chitrugupta, the record keeper and the god of judgement, about the details of Kalaka's life. Chitrugupta told the details of Kalaka's life and said: 'She is bound to roam as a ghost for a long time.'

Lord Yama's messengers left Kalaka in the desert. Kalaka got into the body of a merchant who passed by that place. While she was coming in the merchant's body by the banks of the River Krishnaveni, the messengers of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, killed the merchant and removed Kalaka's ghost. After coming out of the merchant's body, Kalaka was wandering here and there and suffering greatly.

It was at this time that the Dharmadatta we mentioned in the beginning of the story encountered Kalaka and sprinkled tulsi water on her. Kalaka remembered her previous lifetimes and said to Dharmadatta: 'Sir! Please save me by your grace from the lowly births I would have to take because of my evil actions. I surrender to your holy feet.' Saying these words, Kalaka fell at Dharmadatta's feet.

Dharmadatta pondered. He felt compassion for Kalaka. He thought: 'It is impossible to save her through ordinary virtuous acts. Hence,



*'Dhruvanarayana' by Raja Ravi Verma*

the best way is to give half of the effect of the fasts I have observed in the Kartik month.' Dharmadatta made Kalaka sit and taught her the eleven-lettered mantra of Lord Vishnu: '*Namo bhagavate vasudevaya*; salutations to

Lord Vishnu.' He poured tulsi water over Kalaka. Then, he gave her half of the merits he had earned just as he had planned. Kalaka was freed of her evil tendencies. She started radiating a brilliance surpassing the beauty of celestial nymphs like Urvashi.


Then landed an airplane from the sky. From that alighted two persons named Punyasheela and Susheela. They were both the servants of God. Surprised at their sight, Dharmadatta prostrated at their feet. The God's servants embraced Dharmadatta and saluted him.

The God's servants told Dharmadatta: 'Sir! You are quite fortunate. You have performed a great charity by great compassion. This woman has been freed of all her sins because of your mercy. She will live in the abode of Vishnu in this lifetime. And your merits will double because of that. Hence, you, along with your two wives, will also go to the abode of Vishnu. In your next lifetime, you would be born as King Dasharatha. Both your wives would be your wives in that lifetime too. This woman, who has received half of your merits, would



*Dasharatha and His Wives at the Putrakameshti Yajna*

also become your wife by the name Kaikeyi. In that lifetime, you would have the Lord as your son. You will again attain heaven after that lifetime.'

Just as the God's servants had said, Kanaka was born as the daughter of Kaikeya and became Dasharatha's wife. However, since there was some remainder of her demoniac nature, she made Sri Ramachandra go to the forest. 



*Ananthashayana, Timeless Reclining Posture, of Lord Vishnu*

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **How to Win an Argument: An Ancient Guide to the Art of Persuasion**

Marcus Tullius Cicero  
Edited and translated by  
James M May

Princeton University Press, 41  
William Street, Princeton, New Jersey  
08540. 2016. xxii + 263 pp. \$16.95. HB.  
ISBN 9780691164335.

Arguments are part of any intelligent conversation not only in philosophy, law, or politics, but in our day-to-day life as well. The art of winning an argument or the art of persuasion is something that every educated person would like to learn or even master. The book under review is a translation of selected passages from various works of Cicero in Latin on rhetoric that helps to develop the skill of effective speaking so as to convince people and win arguments.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), considered one of Rome’s greatest orators, was a statesman, orator, lawyer, and philosopher, who served as consul in the year 63 BCE. James M May writes in the preface: ‘Trained from boyhood in the technicalities of rhetoric, Cicero excelled not only as an effective public speaker, who won the vast majority of arguments in which he was involved, but also as a theorist in the art of verbal persuasion, having written during his lifetime several treatises that have rhetoric as their subject’ (viii).

Cicero’s first rhetorical work was *De Inventione*, ‘On Invention’, and his greatest work is considered to be *De Oratore*, ‘On Oratory’, a dialogue on the ideal orator. His other works include *De Republica*, ‘On the Republic’; *De Legibus*, ‘On the Laws’; *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, ‘On Moral Ends’; and *De Natura Deorum*, ‘On the Nature of the Gods’—to name a few. As a distinguished

translator and philosopher with a command over prose-style, Cicero’s influence on Latin and other European languages was immense for centuries to come.

According to Cicero, eloquence or powerful persuasive speech originated from the beginning of human civilisation, since common people began to group themselves under someone who excelled in the power of thought and speech. ‘What is so pleasing to the mind and to the ear as speech distinguished and refined by wise thoughts and impressive words?’ (5). A leader should be able to express his thoughts powerfully through speech so as to win over the minds of all and direct them towards the wellbeing of the society. ‘I assert that the leadership and wisdom of the perfect orator provide the chief basis, not only for his own dignity, but also for the safety of countless individuals and of the State at large’ (6–7). But Cicero was aware of the harmful nature of eloquence without wisdom and a spirit of sacrifice. Hence, he asserted: ‘The person who arms himself with eloquence in such a way that enables him not to assail the interests of his country, but rather assist them, this man, in my opinion, will be a citizen most helpful and most devoted both to his own interests and those of the public’ (10).

May contextualises almost every passage of Cicero by stating its present-day relevance and extracting the essence of a text written more than two millennia ago. For instance, introducing Cicero’s teaching on ‘The Value of Writing to Prepare for Effective Speaking’, May emphasises the importance of writing ‘clearly and cogently’ which is timely in the age of computers and smartphones (122).

Cicero states three means of persuasion that develops the art of oratory: ‘Proving that our contentions are true [that is, *logos*], winning over our audience [that is, *ethos*], and inducing their minds

to feel any emotion the case may demand [that is, *pathos*]’ (17). This is possible only when one has a thorough knowledge of the subject as well as the experience of its application in practical life. One should develop the skill of discovering the facts and reasons, knowing the areas where they are found.

For such a person who has sharpened one’s intellect and skill, ‘nothing will escape you, and everything that is in the subject matter will run up to you and fall into your hands’ (19). Apart from the correct presentation of facts, what impresses the audience is the character, behaviour, and personality of the speaker; hence, only one who has nurtured these positive qualities would be able to develop the power of persuasion. Further, the power of the argument greatly depends on its emotional appeal; therefore, the greatest speaker is one who actually feels the emotions that one hopes to evoke in the audience.

Sometimes it may be the deep grief and passion behind the powerful words of the speaker that arouses the pathos and awakens the listeners in favour of the argument. Cicero gives the example of how he had pleaded for his friend Plancius making the effective use of pathos to sway the jury in his client’s favour. He mentions how Plancius had given him support and shelter during the dark days of exile from Rome, linking Plancius’s current plight with his own situation while in exile.

Every formal speech must have four parts: an introduction or prologue, a narration or statement of facts, an argument including refutation of opposing arguments, and a conclusion or epilogue. Each of these have been explained in detail giving examples from Cicero’s speeches and the cases he pleaded to success. May points out that the ‘prologue of the speech is a passage designed to bring our audience into proper state of mind in order to receive the rest of the argument’ (44) and also that an ‘ideal narration should possess three qualities: brevity, clarity, and persuasiveness or plausibility’ (50).

Refutation of the opponent’s argument is an important factor in the proof of one’s own argument. Cicero states four ways of refutation: ‘If one or more of its assumptions is not granted; or

if the assumptions are granted, it is denied that a conclusion can be drawn from them; or the actual form or argument is shown to be fallacious; or a strong argument is countered by one equally strong or stronger’ (61). In the epilogue, one has to sum up or recapitulate previous arguments and arouse the listener’s emotions by employing pathos.

Finally, it is the style of presentation with the effective use of words and intellectual connection that makes the difference. Cicero clarifies ‘that discovering words for a distinguished style is impossible without having produced and shaped the thoughts, and that no thought can shine clearly without the enlightening power of words’ (71). The style may differ from person to person and also depends on the particular occasion, opponent, or audience. Hence one has to acquire the wisdom to fit one’s speech or argument to the most appropriate style suited to particular situation. ‘The foundation of eloquence, just as of everything else, is wisdom. In a speech, just as in life, nothing is more difficult than to discern what is appropriate’ (82).

May gives a ten-point summary of Cicero’s art of effective speaking: ‘1. Nature, art, and practice, practice, practice. ... 2. Eloquence is a powerful weapon. ... 3. Identify, arrange, memorize. ... 4. Not by logic alone. ... 5. Know your audience. ... 6. Be clear, be correct. ... 7. Delivery matters. ... 8. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. ... 9. The pen is often mightier than the sword. ... 10. Words, without substance, are hollow things’ (135–9).

The original Latin of the texts that have been selected is given at the end of this book. Much useful is the glossary of important names and terms used in this book. To encourage a serious engagement with the subject, May gives a list of the primary and secondary sources.

There is much of great value in this book to be grasped by all those who want to master the art of effective speaking or winning an argument. May has done a good job in arranging the matter in sequence for the reader to understand, giving masterly introduction and summary in each instance. The book is indeed a classic on the art of persuasion.

Swami Shantachittananda  
Associate Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*

# MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.  
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

## ***Moral Perception***

Robert Audi

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2013. xiv + 180 pp. \$42. HB. ISBN 9780691156484.

THIS BOOK WAS PREPARED for the Soochow Lectures in Philosophy and, in an earlier, shorter version, presented at Soochow University in Taipei in March 2011. The Soochow series is intended to stand as a source of continuing contributions to philosophy and a setting for establishing fruitful connections between philosophers in Taiwan and many other philosophers worldwide. Even beyond those connections, the series aims at stimulating interchanges of ideas between philosophers working in Chinese and those working in other languages. With this context in mind, I have selected a topic that spans three very broad areas and should interest philosophers and others working in any of these fields: ethics, both theoretical and practical; epistemology, conceived as the theory of knowledge and justification; and moral psychology, conceived as inquiry in the areas of overlap between philosophy of mind and ethical theory. The book is intended to engage the interests of philosophers and other thinkers working in any of these areas.

Perception is not only basic for success in everyday life and scientific inquiry; it is essential for moral knowledge and crucial for cross-cultural understanding. It is the common root that nourishes our cognitive structure; it anchors that structure to the grounds from which truth emerges; and it sustains the vast and various

superstructures we build from the foundational materials that perception provides. If there is moral perception, and if some of our sound moral beliefs suitably rest on it, then there is moral knowledge.

A perennial quest of philosophy is to construct an adequate conception of the human person and to frame sound standards for human conduct. In the domain of ethics, standards of interpersonal conduct are central. Ethical conduct is essential for human civilization, and in our globalized world, with its increasing international interdependence, nothing is more important than universal adherence to sound ethical standards. Is there any moral knowledge that can serve as a basis for such standards? That is one of the broad questions motivating this book.

With the successes and intellectual prominence of modern science, philosophers and many others who think about the status of ethics have been concerned with the apparent disparity between our ways of arriving at moral judgments and our ways of arriving at beliefs and judgments by using scientific methods. A great many contemporary academics and others maintain—or simply presuppose—that if we have any moral knowledge, that knowledge must be broadly empirical and ultimately amenable to scientific confirmation. This view is implicit in the most common kind of contemporary naturalism. Much could be said about what counts



as naturalism, and Chapter 3 will explore the extent to which my theory of moral perception may be considered naturalistic. For our purposes, it is sufficient to bear in mind a wide conception of naturalism. In very broad terms, we might think of it as the position that, first, nature—conceived as the physical universe—is all there is; second, the only basic truths are truths of nature; and, third, the only substantive knowledge is of natural facts. Science, of course, is taken by naturalists to be the highest authority concerning what the truths of nature are.

Naturalism as most commonly conceived contrasts not only with supernaturalistic theism but also with epistemological rationalism. In outline, rationalism in epistemology is the view that the proper use of reason, independently of confirmation from sense experience, yields substantive knowledge (as opposed to knowledge of logical or analytic propositions). A robust rationalism extends to including certain sorts of moral knowledge as among the substantive kinds that may be described as *a priori*. Such knowledge, though not *unscientific*, is non-scientific. There is, however, a major point of important agreement between rationalists and naturalists, even those naturalists who are empiricists. It is that perception is a major source of possible knowledge of its objects and that any genuine knowledge of the physical universe depends on perception.

My main project in this book is to show how perception figures in giving us moral knowledge and how moral perception is connected with intuition and emotion. In showing this, I will combat stereotypes regarding both intuition and emotion, especially the view that they are either outside the rational order or tainted by irrationality. In doing this, I will at many points criticize one or another form of *intellectualism*. By this I mean the tendency to treat perception,

cognition (especially belief formation), and rationality itself as dependent on intellectual operations such as inference, reasoning processes, and analysis. Rationality is not intellectuality, and intellectual activity is not entailed by rationality in belief, action, judgment, or other elements that may be appraised in the dimensions of truth or rationality.

More broadly still, I hope to realize two complementary aims: to lay out major elements of a moral philosophy that reflects a well-developed epistemology and to make epistemological points that emerge best in exploring the possibility of moral knowledge. I try to do this from the perspective of a philosophy of mind that makes it possible to understand human agency and cognition with minimal posits: roughly, without burdening the mental life of rational persons—and doubtless our brains—any more than necessary for understanding the data. Here I join forces with many colleagues in neuroscience and with many philosophers holding views more naturalistic than mine. In this spirit, and from the standpoint of both epistemology and philosophy of mind, I aim at clarifying both the nature of intuition and emotion and their evidential role in yielding justified moral judgments and moral knowledge.

If this overall project succeeds in the way I intend, it provides a foundation for affirming the possibility of moral knowledge that is, on the one hand, based on perception and hence empirical and, on the other hand, comprehensible in terms of a framework of *a priori* moral principles that are not empirical and are knowable by reflection. Moral philosophy spans the empirical and *a priori* domains, and I shall argue that it does so in a way that makes possible both objective moral judgments and cross-cultural communication in ethics.



# REPORTS

## **Commemoration of the 125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA**

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: In India: **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata:** A youths' convention on 25 August 2019 in which 90 students took part. **Baranagar Math:** Two talks on 24 and 26 August which were attended by 153 students and teachers. **Coimbatore Mission:** Cultural competitions at 10 schools and colleges in and around Coimbatore from 24 July to 20 August. In all, 1,222 students took part in the competitions. At all the venues, the competitions were followed by a talk, an awards ceremony, and a skit. **Cooch Behar:** A youths' convention and a devotees' convention on 27 July, which were attended by 400 people in all. **Hyderabad:** Programmes in 54 schools between 25 June and 26 August in which about 19,000 students took part. In each school, talks, recitations, and cultural competitions were held. **Mangaluru:** (i) A seminar on 10 August attended by 630 delegates. (ii) Lecture programmes in 8 colleges in the month of August which were attended by 3,340 youths in all. **Nattarampalli:** Students' conventions at two rural schools on 9 and 16 August, which were attended by 1,100 students, and brief talks at 22 schools in different villages from 16 to 22 August reaching out to about 1,000 students. **Pune:** A seminar on 11 August in which 425 people took part, and a musical play in Thane on 18 August on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda, which was attended by about 1,200 people. **Rajkot:** A convention on 4 August in which 700 people participated. **Taki:** Seminars at two high schools in North 24



*Inauguration of Ramakrishna Mission, Shyamsayer, Bardhaman*

Parganas district on 9 and 22 August in which a total of 356 students took part. Outside India: **Bagerhat, Bangladesh:** A devotees' convention and a cultural programme on 20 August, attended by 600 devotees. **Lusaka, Zambia:** A special talk on 9 August, attended by 85 people. **Mymensingh, Bangladesh:** Two programmes on 28 August: A devotees' convention, attended by 700 devotees, and cultural competitions in which 250 students took part.

## **News of Branch Centres**

A procession and a public meeting were held at **Ramakrishna Mission, Shyamsayer, Bardhaman**, a sub-centre directly under the supervision of Belur Math, on 24 August to mark the taking over of Burdwan Sree Ramakrishna Ashram and starting of a sub-centre of the Ramakrishna Mission there. Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the meeting.

As part of its centenary celebrations, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem**, held the following programmes: (i) Vivekananda Ratha, carriage, visited 159 educational institutions and other public places in Salem, Dharmapuri, and Krishnagiri districts from 14 July to 5 August. (ii) Cultural competitions were conducted from 25 July to 2 August in which 1,579 students from 29 schools in and around Salem took part. Winners were awarded prizes on 18 August. (iii) Meetings were called at a government hospital in Salem on 17 and 18 August in which 470 house-keeping staff of the hospital participated. (iv) A



Inauguration of Skill Development Centre at Chennai Students' Home

women's convention was held at a public hall in Salem on 22 August; it was attended by about 800 paramedical students and devotees.

**RKMVERI**, deemed university, inaugurated on its Belur campus a three-year degree course on Indian Heritage and Philosophy on 30 July, the sacred birthday of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Maharaj.

**Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira**, the residential college of teacher education under **Saradapitha, Belur**, celebrated its diamond jubilee through a week-long programme from 4 to 11 August. Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the celebration which included a seminar, special discourses, youths' convention, blood donation camp, convention for municipality workers, and a few cultural events.

A library at the Sanskrit college of **Ramakrishna Math, Pala** was inaugurated on 5 August.

Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office and Development of North-Eastern Region, Government of India, visited Vivekananda Cultural Centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong** on 9 August.

The Indian Epic Culture Centre, Kolkata, presented Viswanayak Vivekananda Award to **Ramakrishna Math (Yogodyan)**,

**Kankurgachhi**, on 18 August. On behalf of the Math, Swami Suvirananda received the award comprising a trophy, a citation and ten thousand and one rupees.

Swami Suvirananda inaugurated the new guest-house at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramharipur** on 29 August.

The under-14 and under-17 football teams of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**, won the state-level Subroto Cup Football Tournament held at Janjgir-Champa in Chhattisgarh from 28 to 31 July. The school also won the overall champion's trophy.

A student of RKMVERI's faculty of General and Adapted Physical Education and Yoga (GAPEY) on **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** campus was part of the under-19 Indian kabaddi team which won the Indo-Nepal Championship held in Nepal on 22 and 23 July. Another student of the same faculty participated in a karate championship held in Coimbatore on 10 and 11 August and secured the first place in the above-18 category.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and Swami Suvirananda inaugurated the Skill Development Centre building at **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai**, on 1 September.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo**, conducted a medical camp at Kombo Tarsu, a remote village located at a distance of 30 km from Aalo, on 12 August in which 80 patients were treated.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Karimganj**, held a blood donation camp on 15 August in which 20 persons donated blood.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Medinipur**, conducted a medical camp at Monidaha, under Medinipur Sadar block, a backward tribal area in Paschim

Medinipur district, on 15 August in which 744 patients were treated.

**Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara**, held two multidisciplinary medical camps in Nadia and South 24 Parganas districts on 28 July and 4 August in which a total of 1,302 patients received treatment. Further, following the outbreak of dengue in West Bengal, the centre also set up four fever clinics in Habra in North 24 Parganas district from 7 to 16 August in which 204 patients were treated. The School Education Department, Government of West Bengal, presented the Best School Award to the high school of Rahara centre in a function held in Kolkata on 5 September. The award consisted of a certificate and a sum of one lakh rupees.

The renovated primary school building of **Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar**, was dedicated by Sri Chowna Mein, Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, on 11 September.

Sri Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State for Culture and Tourism, Government of India, visited **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, on 15 September.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi-Morabadi**, observed the concluding phase of the golden jubilee of its Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra from 23 to 30 September. Swami Vagishanandaji and the Governor of Jharkhand, Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the celebration. A commemorative volume was released and public meetings, an alumni meet, a seminar on 'Regeneration of Rural India', religious discourses, and several cultural events were held. A number of government officers, monks, students, and devotees attended the programmes.

### **New Math Centre**

A new branch of Ramakrishna Math has been started on the premises of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, **Purnea**, following its merger with the



*Viswanayak Vivekananda Award to Kankurgachi Math*

Math. The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Math, Bhatta Bazar, Purnea, Bihar 854301. Ph. no.: 99733 25907 and email id: <purnea@rkmm.org>.

### **New Mission Centres**

Ramakrishna Vivekananda Ashram, **Kasundia, Howrah**, was taken over by the Ramakrishna Mission on 10 August, and a new branch of the Mission has been functioning there since then. The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Mission, No. 4, Naskarpara Lane, Kasundia, Howrah, West Bengal 711101. Ph. no.: (033) 2642 0932 and email id: <kasundia@rkmm.org>.

A new branch of Ramakrishna Mission has been started on the premises of Sri Ramakrishna Sangha, **Rourkela**, following its takeover by the Mission. The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Mission, Hamirpur, Rourkela, Dist. Sundargarh, Odisha 769003. Ph. no.: (0661) 2643764, 89108 03937 and email id: <rourkela@rkmm.org>.

### **New Math Sub-centre**

**Piñon Hills Retreat**, where Hollywood Vedanta Society, USA, has been conducting some activities for the last few years, has now been made an official sub-centre of the Society. Its address is: Piñon Hills Retreat, 720 Sage Road, Piñon Hills, California 92372. Ph. no.: 949 326 3002 and email id: <phretreat@vedanta.org>.



*Youth Convention in Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata*

### **Values Education and Youth Programmes**

**Barisha** centre held a values education programme on 13 July, which was attended by 36 school students.

**Chandigarh** Ashrama held two special talks in an educational institution and on the centre's campus on 8 August, which were attended by a total of about 650 students.

**Contai** centre held values education programmes at 15 schools from January to March, which were attended by 6,277 students. The centre also conducted cultural competitions at 12 schools from January to May in which 1,222 students took part.

**Delhi** centre conducted 41 values education workshops in 18 towns and cities spread all over India between 27 June and 27 July, which were attended by a total of 2,111 teachers and 72 principals. The centre conducted 42 values education workshops in 19 towns and cities all over India between 27 July and 27 August, which were attended by a total of 2,708 teachers and 137 principals.

**Gadadhar** Ashrama held three students' conventions at three schools in Hooghly district on 1, 2, and 3 July, which were attended by about 500 students in all.

**Gurap** Ashrama held a youths' convention on 15 August, attended by 240 youths.

**Medinipur** centre held a values education workshop on 21 July in which 370 students and teachers from 12 educational institutions took part.

**Rahara** centre conducted two youths' conventions on 30 June and 10 August, which were attended by 75 youths in all.

**Rajkot** Ashrama conducted 22 values education programmes in the Ashrama, and 28 values education programmes at schools in Amreli, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Kutch, and Rajkot districts from 2 to 25 July, attended by 10,521 students. The Ashrama held a residential personality development camp on 10 and 11 August in which 45 students of a polytechnic college participated. The Ashrama also conducted, from 26 July to 21 August, 21 values education programmes in the Ashrama, and values education programmes at 23 schools in Amreli, Botad, Kutch, and Rajkot districts; a total of 8,827 students attended these programmes.

**Vadodara** centre held 6 values education programmes on its campus and another 10 programmes at schools in Vadodara and Panchmahal districts from 3 to 27 July. In all, 2,668 students participated in these programmes. The centre held 2 values education programmes on its campus and another 4 programmes at 4 schools in two districts in August. In all, 2,939 students participated in these programmes.

### **Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)**

**Mangaluru** Ashrama conducted the following activities in August: (i) four cleanliness drives in Mangaluru involving 1,675 volunteers, (ii) awareness campaigns for 24 days in which volunteers reached out to 1,480 households in different parts of Mangaluru city, spreading awareness about waste management, (iii) cleanliness drives in 152 villages of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, (iv) magic shows on the cleanliness theme in 34 schools in Udupi district, (v)

observance of Cleanliness Day in 130 schools in which about 13,000 children participated, and (vi) a seminar on Clean India on 9 August, attended by 650 youths.

## Relief

**Flood Relief:** (i) **Assam:** Continuing its flood relief work, **Guwahati** centre conducted a medical camp in Darang district of Assam on 10 August in which 473 patients were treated. (ii) **Bihar:** **Kati-har** centre distributed 2,500 kg *chira*, rice flakes, and 260 kg *gur*, molasses, among 885 flood-affected families in three blocks of Katihar district from 31 July to 7 August. (iii) **Gujarat:** Owing to heavy rainfall, many areas of Vadodara city and nearby villages were inundated with water, causing widespread disruption of normal life. **Vadodara** centre served cooked food to 2,300 affected people and distributed 7,884 food packets. The centre also distributed 396 ration kits—each kit containing 10 kg flour, 4 kg rice, 1.5 kg dal, 1 kg edible oil, 1 kg salt, 1 kg sugar, 250 grams tea leaves, and 200 grams assorted spices—and 192 saris among 396 families, and educational kits—each kit containing 1 geometry box, 3 pencils, 3 erasers, 3 sharpeners, 3 scales, and 3 notebooks—among 1,000 needy students in 6 schools of Vadodara district from 1 to 29 August. (iv) **Karnataka:** (a) Owing to heavy rainfall, many areas of Belagavi town suffered severe waterlogging. Consequently, **Belagavi** centre distributed 246 packets of biscuits, 336 water bottles, and 123 packets of candles among 123 affected families on 10 August. Subsequently, the centre distributed the following items, from 11 to 21 August, among 1,231 flood-affected families of the villages along the banks of Krishna River in Belagavi district, which were severely inundated owing to rising water levels: 3,210 kg rice, 2,038 kg dal, 4,562 kg flour, 1,250 kg *jowar*, sorghum flour, 1,043 kg chickpeas, 511 kg semolina, 836 kg *chira*, 1,443 kg sugar, 1,532 litres of



Flood Relief in Wayanad, Kerala, by Koyilandy centre

edible oil, 1,123 kg salt, 225 kg chilli powder, 246 kg tea powder, 2,944 packets of biscuits, 323 mats, 1,342 blankets, 1,336 bedsheets, 450 buckets, 450 mugs, 200 packets of candles, 620 matchboxes, 280 plates, 2,246 bars of bathing soap, 2,246 bars of washing soap, 1,123 tubes of toothpaste, 2,044 toothbrushes, 460 packets of mosquito-repellent coils, 1,231 saris, 1,242 other garments for women, 1,202 lungis, 29 dhotis, 1,123 T-shirts, 251 other garments for men, and 2,274 towels. Further, on 15 August a team of doctors from the centre visited 2 villages and treated about 250 patients and also sensitised the villagers about the need for hygiene and safe drinking water. (b) In the wake of severe rainfall in Kodagu district, **Ponnampet** centre distributed 925 kg rice, 9 grocery kits, 210 packets of biscuits, 142 saris, 71 lungis, 89 T-shirts, 91 trousers, 471 women's garments, 514 undergarments, 275 sweaters, 298 towels, 81 shawls, 81 raincoats, 358 blankets, 109 tarpaulins, 972 notebooks, 20 geometry boxes, 162 stationery kits, 9 school bags, 63 tubes of toothpastes and toothbrushes, 20 kg bleaching powder, 12 tissue paper rolls, 36 baskets, and 89 buckets and mugs among 981 affected families in 20 villages from 6 to 23 August. (v) **Kerala:** (a) **Koyilandy** centre distributed 2,100 kg rice, 200 kg dal, 200 kg edible oil, 400 packets of biscuits, 400 saris, 400 dhotis, and 200 bars of soap among 300 families

in Kozhikode and Wayanad districts on 17 and 25 August. (b) Students of the Sanskrit college of **Pala** centre participated in flood relief service by collecting the following items and subsequently distributing them among 105 flood-affected families of Kottayam and Wayanad districts from 13 to 16 August: 275 kg rice, 20 kg lentils, 110 kg flour, 50 kg potatoes, 50 kg onions, 55 packets of cooking oil, 55 kg salt, 50 packets of biscuits, 1 kg coffee powder, 30 kg sugar, 500 bottles of drinking water, 60 bars of soap, 55 packets of detergent powder, 50 toothbrushes, 50 tubes of toothpaste, 50 packets of candles, 5 lungis, 5 ladies' garments, 50 children's garments, 60 towels, and 50 bottles of cleaning solution. (vi) **Maharashtra**: In the wake of severe water inundation caused by heavy rainfall in western Maharashtra, **Pune** centre served 17,700 packets of cooked food and distributed 1,500 kg rice, 10,000 kg *jowar*, sorghum flour, 2,500 kg flour, 1,470 kg dal, 100 kg semolina, 20 kg sago, 50 kg *chira*, 20 kg peanuts, 250 kg salt, 1,171 kg assorted spices, 1,500 kg edible oil, 110 kg tea leaves, 40 kg milk powder, 600 kg sugar, 900 matchboxes, 2,600 candles, 100 tubes of toothpaste, 100 bars of soap, 100 bars of washing soap, 1,200 blankets, 1,000 bedsheets and 1,200 mats among 1,500 affected families in Sangli, Satara, and Kolhapur districts from 7 to 30 August. (vii) **Tamil Nadu**: Owing to heavy rains, some tribal villages in the Western Ghats near Coimbatore were badly affected. **Coimbatore Mission** centre distributed 332 mats and 342 blankets among 204 families in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu and the Wayanad district of Kerala.

**Fire Relief: Arunachal Pradesh**: In response to a fire incident at a village near Aalo in which a house was completely burnt down, **Aalo** centre gave 10 blankets, 12 shirts, 12 trousers, 9 jackets, 9 sweaters, 3 belts, a set of utensils—containing a *karahi*, 3 pots, a bucket, 4 plates, 4 bowls, 2 ladles, a jug, a mug, and a pan—20 notebooks, 4



*Distress Relief by Lusaka centre*

pencils, 4 pens, 4 erasers, and 4 pencil sharpeners to the affected family on 23 August.

**Distress Relief**: The following centres distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: **India**: (a) **Aalo**: 309 shirts, 391 trousers, 114 sweaters, 16 jackets, 78 blankets, 910 notebooks, 546 pencils, 182 erasers, and 182 sharpeners from 6 June to 23 August. (b) **Antpur**: 998 shirts from 14 to 27 August. (c) **Contai**: 990 shirts and 500 trousers from 2 July to 18 July. (d) **Guwahati**: 1,560 shirts and 1,500 tops from 28 July to 27 August. (e) **Hatamunguda**: 982 shirts, 988 trousers, 560 sweaters, 431 jackets, and 190 umbrellas from 21 July to 16 August. (f) **Karimganj**: 1 bicycle on 15 August. (g) **Malda**: 1,928 shirts, 1,763 trousers, 696 sweaters, sweatshirts, or jackets, and 1,147 saris from 18 July to 26 August. (h) **Nagpur**: 1,058 school uniforms, 3,174 notebooks and 1,058 pens from 11 July to 3 August. (i) **Nattarampalli**: 1,024 school uniforms from 16 to 21 August. (j) **Rahara**: 695 shirts, 639 T-shirts, 403 trousers, and 403 sweaters from 4 to 18 August. (k) **Ramanathapuram**: 1,000 shirts and 1,000 trousers from 27 July to 8 August. (l) **Tiruvalla**: 11,584 notebooks, 9,141 geometry boxes, and 806 T-shirts from 11 July to 22 August. **Zambia: Lusaka**: 100 kg powdered maize and 100 assorted garments on 30 August.

## SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA BIRTH CENTENARY COMMITTEE

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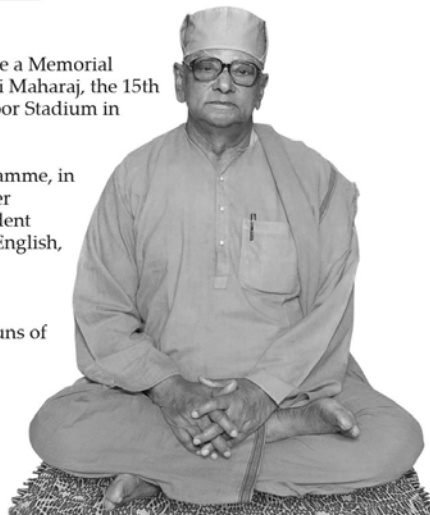
Dear Devotees,

Swami Atmasthananda Birth Centenary Committee has decided to organise a Memorial Programme to celebrate the Centenary of Most Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, the 15th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at the Netaji Indoor Stadium in Kolkata on **Sunday, 10th May 2020**.

The Committee is extremely glad to announce that in this Memorial Programme, in the august presence of Most Revered Monks of the Ramakrishna Order and other dignitaries, it will release Commemorative Volume on Most Revered 15th President Maharaj based on his literary works, lectures, interviews, letters & teachings in English, Bengali, Hindi and in Gujarati languages.

Also, a Commemorative Volume comprising of the reminiscences of Most Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj shared by the Revered Monks and Nuns of Ramakrishna Math and Sri Sarada Math respectively and of other devotees and dignitaries will be released on that day.

A Pictorial Biography portraying the life sketch of Most Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj will also be released in the Programme. Also, a documentary film DVD based on the life and teachings of Most Revered 15th President Maharaj will also be published on that day.



Most Revered President Maharaj and Revered Vice Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order would grace the occasion and other monks and dignitaries would share their rich reminiscences of Most Revered 15th President Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj with the audience in this Memorial Programme.

In this regard, Swami Atmasthananda Birth Centenary Committee invites you to become a Delegate Member which would enable you to attend this Memorial Programme and get certain tangible benefits. The Committee has decided to issue limited numbers of Delegate Membership cards for this Programme on a first cum first serve basis.

The Delegate Membership charge is **Rs. 1,500/- (One Thousand Five Hundred Only)** per member. Each Delegate Member will get a **discount of 30%** on the two Commemorative Volumes and the pictorial biography on Most Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj. The documentary film DVD on Most Revered 15th President Maharaj will be presented to all Delegate Members as a complimentary gift.

Also, the Committee invites the interested devotees / members to share rare photographs of Most Revered Maharaj and letters written by him via email for the Commemorative Volumes on Most Revered 15th President Maharaj.

Swami Atmasthananda Birth Centenary Committee need your financial assistance for this noble cause.

All donations (cash / cheque) should be made in favour of: **"SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA BIRTH CENTENARY COMMITTEE"**



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The registration as a Delegate Member for this Programme will start from mid November 2019 at these branch Centres:

- A. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark,
- B. Udbodhan Office Bagbazar,
- C. Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math,
- D. Ramakrishna Math Yogodyan, Kankurgaachi,
- E. Advaita Ashrama, Entally,
- F. Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata.

Entry card for this Programme will be available to the enlisted Delegate Members from the above mentioned Centres from **February 2020**.

Thanking you  
**S. K. Roy**  
(President)

**Swami Atmasthananda Birth Centenary Committee**



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61

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This book explores Swami Vivekananda's unself and benevolent love for his brother disciples, and the world in general. The analysis and conclusion presented in the book are the author's own, and may not represent the general views of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The author is grateful to Advaita Ashrama for agreeing to sell and distribute this book.

Asim Chaudhuri, Author-Publisher,  
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*We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.*

*Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.*



*Swami Vivekananda*

ABP

## **An Appeal**

The composer of the Kathamrita (Gospel of Ramakrishna), Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta's residential house (Kathamrita Bhavan) has become a Branch Centre of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math. Sri Sri Thakur, Sri Sri Ma, Sri Sri Swamiji and other disciples of Thakur, have all blessed this holy place with the dust of their feet. As the space of this heritage building is very small, an adjacent Building was recently purchased by the Math Centre. In addition to serving as an abode for spiritual Sadhakas, this centre provides free services to the poor, including a Charitable Dispensary, a Free Coaching centre for poor students, and also a Computer Training Centre for the underprivileged at nominal rates. The



building which provides these services is more than two hundred years old, and in urgent need of renovation. The cost for renovation will be approximately INR 1 Cr. (One Crore). We humbly request that the sincere devotees of the Holy Trio kindly and generously support this noble cause. May the blessings of the Holy Trio and Sri M be bestowed upon all of you is our ardent prayer. Donations, either Cash / Cheque/ RTGS/NEFT/Draft should be sent to Ramakrishna Math, Kathamrita Bhavan and include the Devotees full Address. Cheques should be made payable to: Ramakrishna Math, Kathamrita Bhavan.

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Adhyaksha



### **Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938)**

During his early days in Allahabad, Swami Vijnanananda would go for a daily bath before sunrise in the *Triveni*, the confluence of three holy rivers. One day after his bath in the *Triveni River*, Vijnanananda had a vision of the goddess Mother Triveni, who appeared as a beautiful young girl with three braids hanging down her back. He was overwhelmed by the vision. He later said of this vision, 'The test of a true vision is this: It leaves a lasting spiritual impression on the mind that generates awareness and bliss. I still get joy when I think of that virginal form of the Divine Mother.'

**Happy Birthday**  
11. 11. 2019



## PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO THE HOLY TRIO IN KOLKATA



### Holy Mother's stay in 10/2 Bose Para Lane

**A**fter the passing away of Sri Thakur, Holy Mother would occasionally visit and stay in Kolkata. As she did not have a permanent place to stay until 1909, Mother stayed in a number of places during her visits to Kolkata. She particularly spent much time in and near the vicinity of Baghbazar, including at the homes of devotees like Mahendranath Gupta (North Kolkata), Balaram Bose, Sharat Sarkar at 59/2 Ramkanta Basu Street, a rented house at 2/1 Baghbazar Street, and many other places. Of the different places which she would stay at in Baghbazar—



Rare and only known photograph of 10/2 Bosepara Lane, taken from Mother's centenary souvenir, published in 1953.

besides Mayer Bari, Udbodhan—perhaps the most important place she stayed in was at 10/2 Bose Para Lane, approximately one block north of Balaram Bose's house. Many significant incidents took place here including (1) Swamiji's first meeting with the Holy Mother, after his return from the West, on 29 April 1897; (2) Sara Bull and Josephine MacLeod visited and had refreshments with Mother on 17 March 1898; (3) in early November 1898, Swamiji made arrangements for Nivedita to stay here in a small room on the ground floor before her move to 16 Bosepara Lane; (4) in November 1898, the first three photographs of Holy Mother were taken here under the arrangement of Sara Bull; (5) in 28 March 1899, Swami Yogananda passed away in this house; (6) on 20 June 1899, Holy Mother arranged a feast here for Swamiji, Turiyananda, and Nivedita, who would leave for the West in the evening. Years later, Nivedita reflected about her stay here and the orthodox backlash which Holy Mother had to experience afterwards. Nivedita wrote, 'This is one of the occasions on which people look back, feeling that their courage was providentially determined by their ignorance. Had I deeply understood, at the time, the degree of social embarrassment which my rashness might have brought, not only upon my innocent hostess (Mother), but also on her kindred in their distant village, I could not have acted as I did.' On Mother's part, however, there was not the least strain or unpleasantness for Nivedita had already found a place in her heart as in her household.

*In loving memory of Dr. Rina Bhar —Dr. Gopal Chandra Bhar*

**Editor:** Swami Narasimhananda. **Printed by:** Swami Vibhatmananda at Gipidi Box Co., 3B Chatu Babu Lane, Kolkata 700 014 and published by him for Advaita Ashrama (Mayavati) from Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, on 1 November 2019.